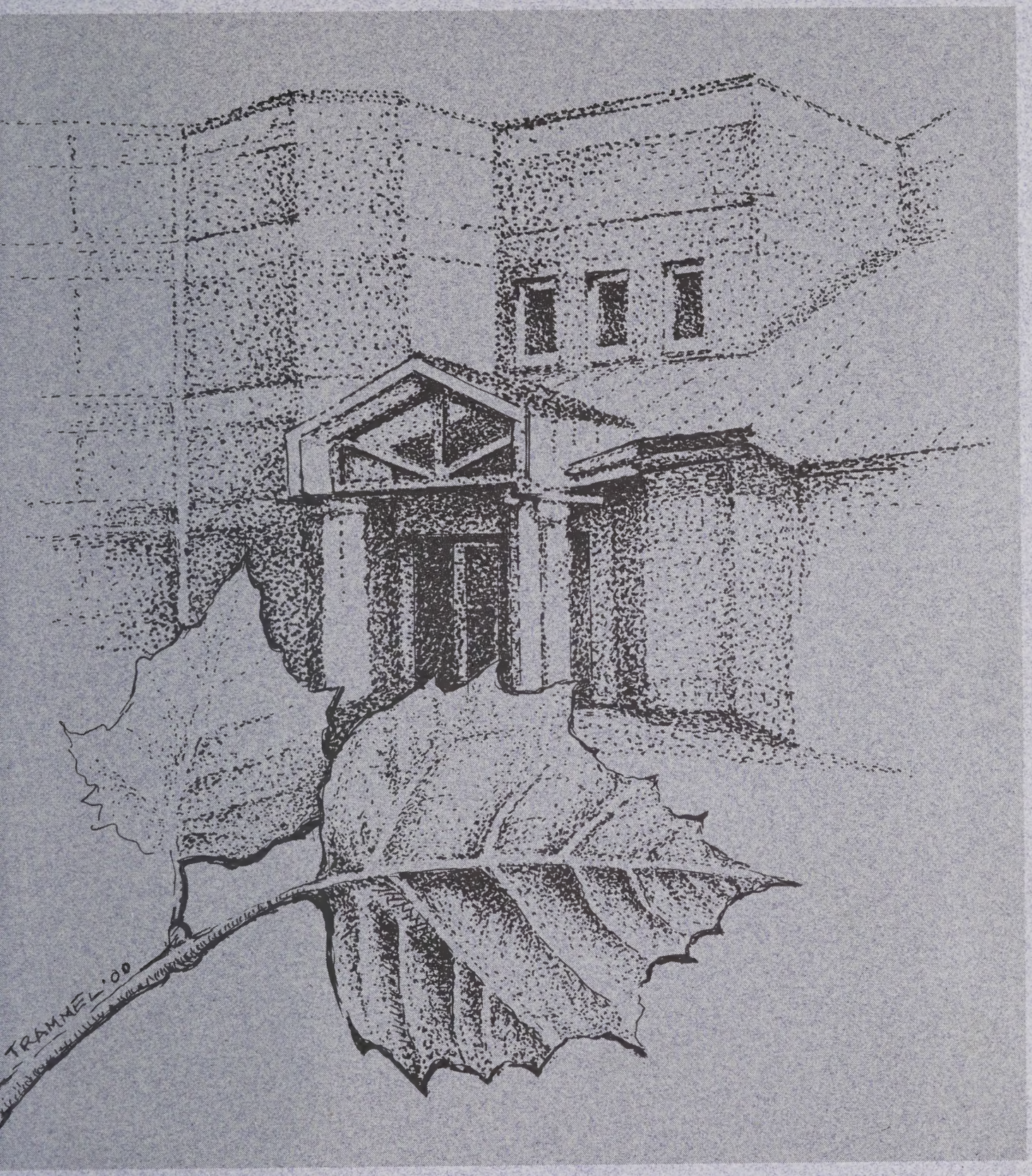

Victoria Press

2000

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

Victoria Press

Sixth Issue

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, North Carolina

2000

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Drawing by Constance M. Smutz iv
Morris by Fred Chappell 1
Drawing by Annie Cicale 2
Secretless by Fred Chappell 3
Photo by Lee Schleining 3
Backsliding by Celia H. Miles 4
Auction by Rita Speltz 5
A Cat Tale by Sue Wright Barron 6
Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore 7
The Clothesline by Dara Llewellyn 8
Drawing by Annie Cicale 9
Dream, Home, Love by Mollie Rubin (Rose) 10
Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore 10
Goldwingers Going Somewhere by Celia H. Miles 11
Harbinger by Nancy Dillingham 12
Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore 12
Drawing by Annie Cicale 13
Her Sister's Shoes by Julia Nunnally Duncan 14
Holocaust Museum by Rita Speltz 16
Photo by Beth Richardson Mitchell 17
Mardi Gras Haiku by Becki Janes 18
A Hole in One by Gerald Metz 18
Hunting by Parker Lewis 19
Photo by Mary McClurkin 21
J.C. Feeds His Cats by Will Hooper 22
Photo by Mary McClurkin 23
The Angel with Black Wings by Sue Wright Barron 24
Photo by Celia H. Miles 24
Joyce by Celia H. Miles 25
Long-Haired Boy by Julia Nunnally Duncan 26
Lilac Buds by Randee Brenner Goodstadt 27
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin 28
Like Yesterday I'm Young Again by Nancy L. Williams 29
On Communication by Gerald Metz 30
Watercolor by Annie Cicale 31
A One-Egg Cake by Dara Llewellyn 32
Photo by Robert O. Parriott 33

LeAnn Gets Lonely by Bill Brooks 34
Pastiche by Bill Findley 35
Photo by Shirley McLaughlin 40
Plus Ça Change by Gerald Metz 41
Ravenous by Will Hooper 42
Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore 42
Jack Johnson, A Novel (excerpt) by Bill Brooks 43
Soaring with the Wind by Gabrielle M. Thompson 44
Photo by Mary McClurkin 45
Salt Takes the Bitterness Out by Tommy Hays 46
Drawing by Annie Cicale 53
Sisters of the Rainbow Waters by Gabrielle M. Thompson 54
Killing Every Memory (of you) by Thomas Gore 56
Photo by Mary McClurkin 57
Thai Lessons by Lee Sokol 58
Truth by Nancy Dillingham 60
Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore 60
Untying Cora by Jan Cavanaugh Graham 61
Photo by Mary McClurkin 62
Whips and Chains by Nancy Dillingham 63
Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore 64
Drawing by Annie Cicale 65
A Fox Hunt with Uncle Joe by Richard B. Hurley 66
Watercolor by Annie Cicale 68
Praying for Peonies by Nancy Dillingham 69
Notes on Contributors 70
Drawing by Annie Cicale 72

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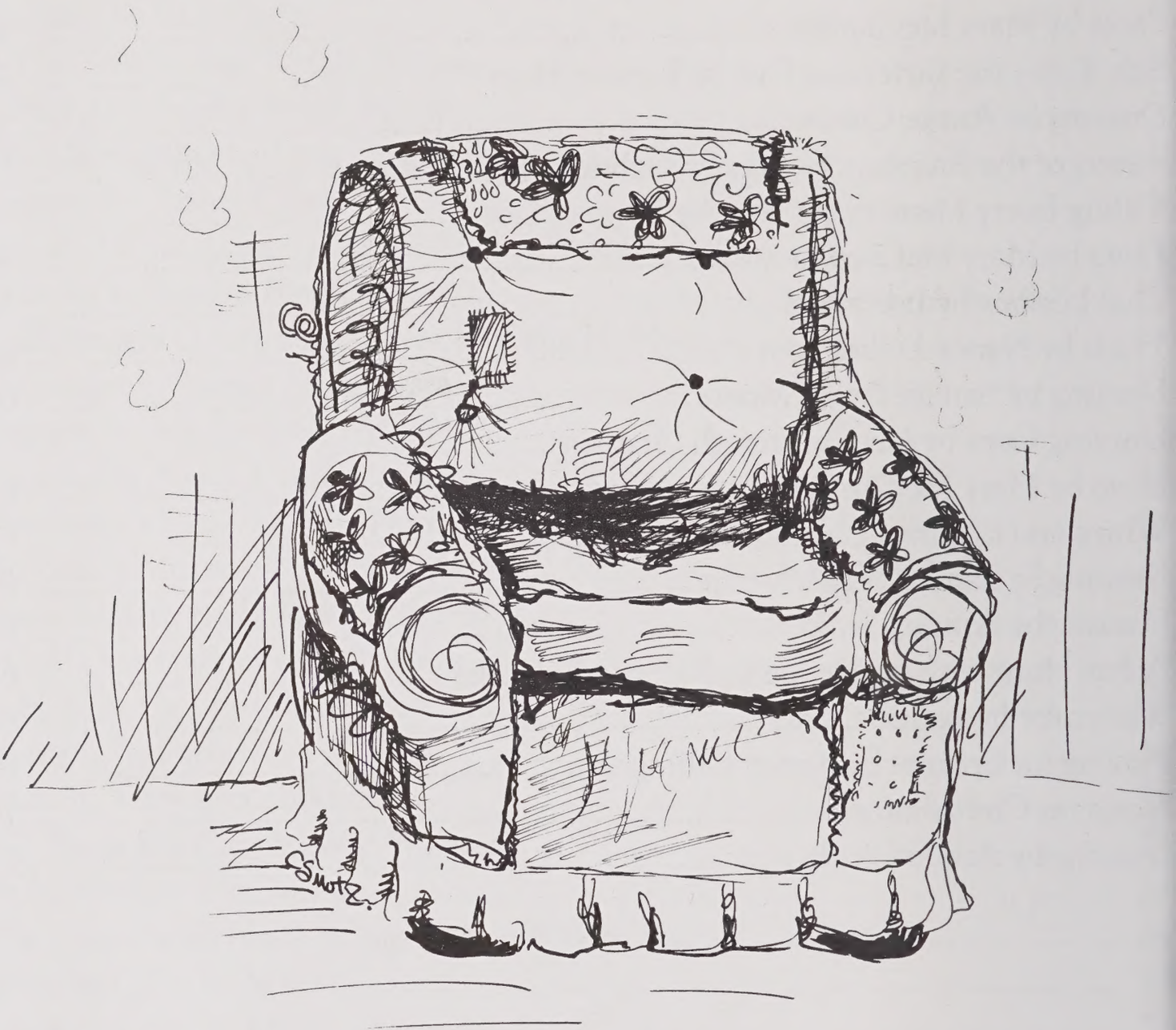
Cover drawing of Sycamore Building by Sharon Trammel



Drawing by Constance M. Smutz

Morris

Fred Chappell

The chair she sat in with an earnest groan
Was lumpy, frumpy, boggy, saggy, butt
Sprung and dingy, weary to the bone
And older than the pleasures of King Tut.

Where it came from no one now recalled;
It was so long a part of Family
Nobody noticed how it had grown bald
And spavined, unsteady as Uncle McGhee.

Aunt Edna would sit there like she owned the place,
And yet she seemed a property of the chair,
As beauty is a property of grace,
Right angles the properties of a square.

Now Aunt Edna's gone. The chair remains,
With drowsy Audrey nestled in its warm
Complacent cushions with their ancient stains
And mends and redolent maternal charm.

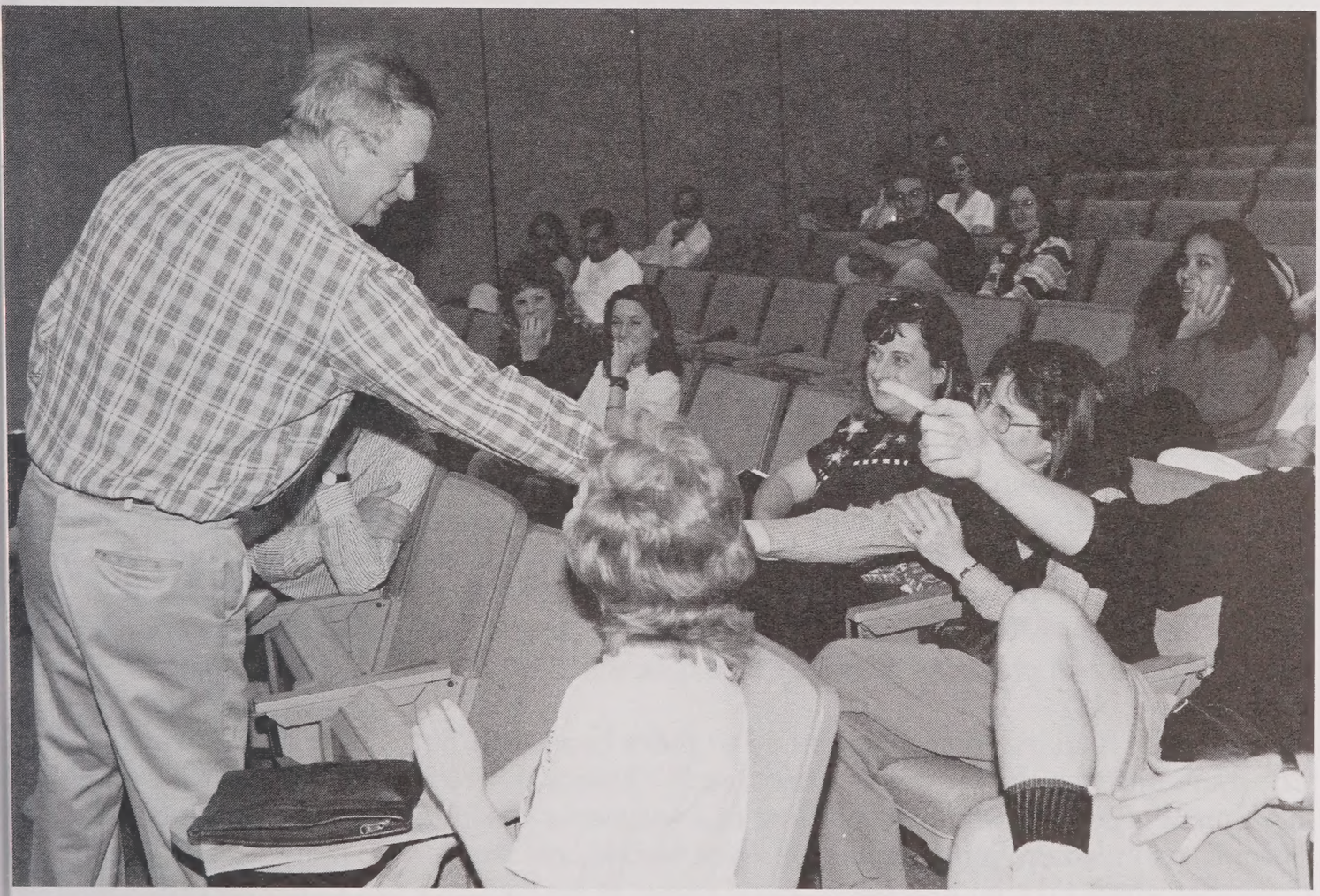
It comforts her as it has comforted
Two generations of kin and eight of cats.
No longer proud, its noblest glories fled,
It humbly supports purses, bottoms, hats.

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Secretless

Fred Chappell

Cousin Vance you know instinctively
Has no secrets. Open as a plain
In Kansas, guileless as a terrapin,
Straightforward, candid to the nth degree.
He tells you anything you like, and more.
What else could make him such a thumping bore?



Fred Chappell, North Carolina's poet laureate, brightens our campus with his visit.

Photo by Lee Schleining

Backsliding

Celia H. Miles

Backsliding was a way of life for Les Bob Sutton. Some folks who didn't get the kind of attention he did at every revival said he kept the preachers in business. If Les had not backslid enough to get re-converted, well, it had not been a very exciting year.

Les staggered down the aisle. He wasn't drunk, not on revival days, just loose-jointed, always just about ready to fly into pieces. All his appendages flopped and ambled. It was a miracle he got down to the altar without following his wandering arms and knees in the direction of first one side of the church, then the other.

He made it and fell to his knees before Preacher Duffey. On either side were four other sinners who had responded to the call. They were new to the conversion experience. Not so Les. He was a regular. Every revival meeting. And for good reason. His exploits kept the community entertained. Not that he was really bad, but he did tend to get caught. But he liked the food at the jail. He could count on Mrs. Orton fixing him cobbler every time. That's because he was so charming. He could charm the birds right off their nests, women said.

"Lord, I have sinned and come up short. I aim to do right. I've give my life to you, Lord, before and I'm here again. A sinner. Lord, forgive me." His head was bowed, his hands clasped in prayer.

Preacher Duffey put both hands on Les's shoulders. His voice was lower and I couldn't hear all he said, but I'd heard it before when I was sitting closer to the front of the church. It always went something like this: "Brother, are you truly repentant? Are you giving your self, your soul and yourself to God? Are you ready to accept him as your savior? Pray about it, brother. This is not a decision to make lightly nor to scoff at. Are you willing to change your ways, ready to accept the Lord's burden? Can you give up the ways of the world and dedicate your life to him, to the Lord who died on the cross for you, brother, for the sweet Jesus who died on the cross for all of us sinners in this room? The sinners here at the altar and the sinners on the benches. We're all sinners and we need the grace of the Lord."

Tears rolled down Les's face, stalling in the full mustache he wore, and then sliding into the corners of his mouth. His loose body was steady as if it were held in place with bailing wire. Then he shook all over. He lowered his head even further, his forehead touching the floor where Preacher Duffey stood, one step higher than the converts. He nodded, almost banging his head on the floor. "I'm ready, Preacher. I hear what you're saying. I know I'm a sinner and I know there's grace abounding for all who love the Lord."

Preacher Duffey asked the others at the front to kneel while he led us all in prayer and he asked the congregation to get off the benches and onto their knees before the Lord, too. Many persons had already moved to the aisle to kneel; others slipped down in front of the pews. Some of us just sat with heads down and eyes mostly closed. I'd seen Les's rededication a couple of times before. I hope Preacher Duffey believed him—and, the Lord, of course. I know I did.

After the final hymn people went up to shake hands with the new and rededicated Christians and to welcome them to the church's bosom. There were smiles and tears and hugs and generally good feelings. A baptizing in a few weeks would make their commitments definite. As I filed up, gently guided by Aunt Mattie, and shook Les's hand, I was trying to remember where I'd seen him last. It came to me: at his baptizing last year. After the dipping in the Tuckaseegee River we'd all gone up to Deacon Carson's house so the baptized could dry off and change clothes and have fellowship and eat cake and drink coffee. I went around the corner of the house to see the new litter of kittens. Les was dripping wet and he had his hand on Evelyn Jones' equally dripping wet breast.

Auction

Rita Speltz

Earth-bound bodies,
filled with the land's bounty,
scratch the ground for more.

Leather smiles break through the rural crowd
while hands dig in boxes
stuffed with memories,
attached to their own,
falling away.

And the bidders push for the neighbor's junk.

Beauty dried up with each summer's labor:
weathered skin bears the burden,
for they carry the yoke
as did the oxen before them.

Today their rough hands reach out and laugh.

The farmer's wife,
his partner in tilling the soil,
stands alone,
fence-leaning,
greeting each neighbor
waiting to carry off
her years of country living.

I touch her agony
but stand apart,
as she stares at the grass,
not to be sold
today.

A Cat Tale

Sue Wright Barron

Back in high school when the annual science fair came around, my boyfriend Nelson (who was of a scientific nature) and I decided to do a team project. We knew we could not make another ecosystem in a pie pan. We had kind of outgrown that, so we decided to do our project on embalming. We made a little graph to show where we were at the beginning and where we needed to be when the project was complete and realized that the first thing we needed was something to embalm. It had to be relatively small, but large enough to be impressive. We talked to our Sunday School teacher who taught science at a rival high school, and she recommended a cat. She even had a cat that she would donate to our project. We were on the right track. We just knew it.

The second thing we needed was to know how to embalm. We talked to the director at the funeral home we passed every day on our way home from school. He solemnly told us he would like to work with us on the project. He suggested that we schedule time to actually work at the funeral home a few evenings to read some of his technical books as well as some texts on the history of embalming. Hey, we were impressed and excited! We were planning to get married as soon as we graduated, and we had begun to think that maybe being funeral directors was our life calling.

We put in our time at the funeral home, and, when the director decided we were ready, he told us to get our "body" and bring it in and he would help us complete the project. We set the time for the following Sunday afternoon. Miss Jackson brought us the cat in a grocery box to Sunday School. We took him on around to my house and locked him in the garage. After lunch we had to figure out a way to kill the cat.

Nelson went into the garage armed with a lead pipe intending to ever so gently bash the cat on the back of the head, thus doing him in; then we would take him to the funeral home to "prepare the body." My mother was designing and sewing the coffin and bedding. All was set. Now this is where your previous knowledge of cats comes in. There does not exist a cat who is going to let a person holding a lead pipe aloft come near him. Think about it!

After two hours of being locked up in a sweltering garage chasing and trying to kill a smart tom cat, Nelson emerged totally defeated. He sat down beside me on the back steps and asked, "What are we going to do now?" We were supposed to be in the embalming room at that very moment completing our project. Obviously, we were not ready. We walked down the railroad tracks to Nelson's house to see if his parents had any suggestions. They were not home. We sank down into the couch in his living room feeling crushed. About that time we saw a gray squirrel running up a little oak tree in Nelson's front yard. He ran and got his rifle. He popped the squirrel just right. We headed for the funeral home with our precious body.

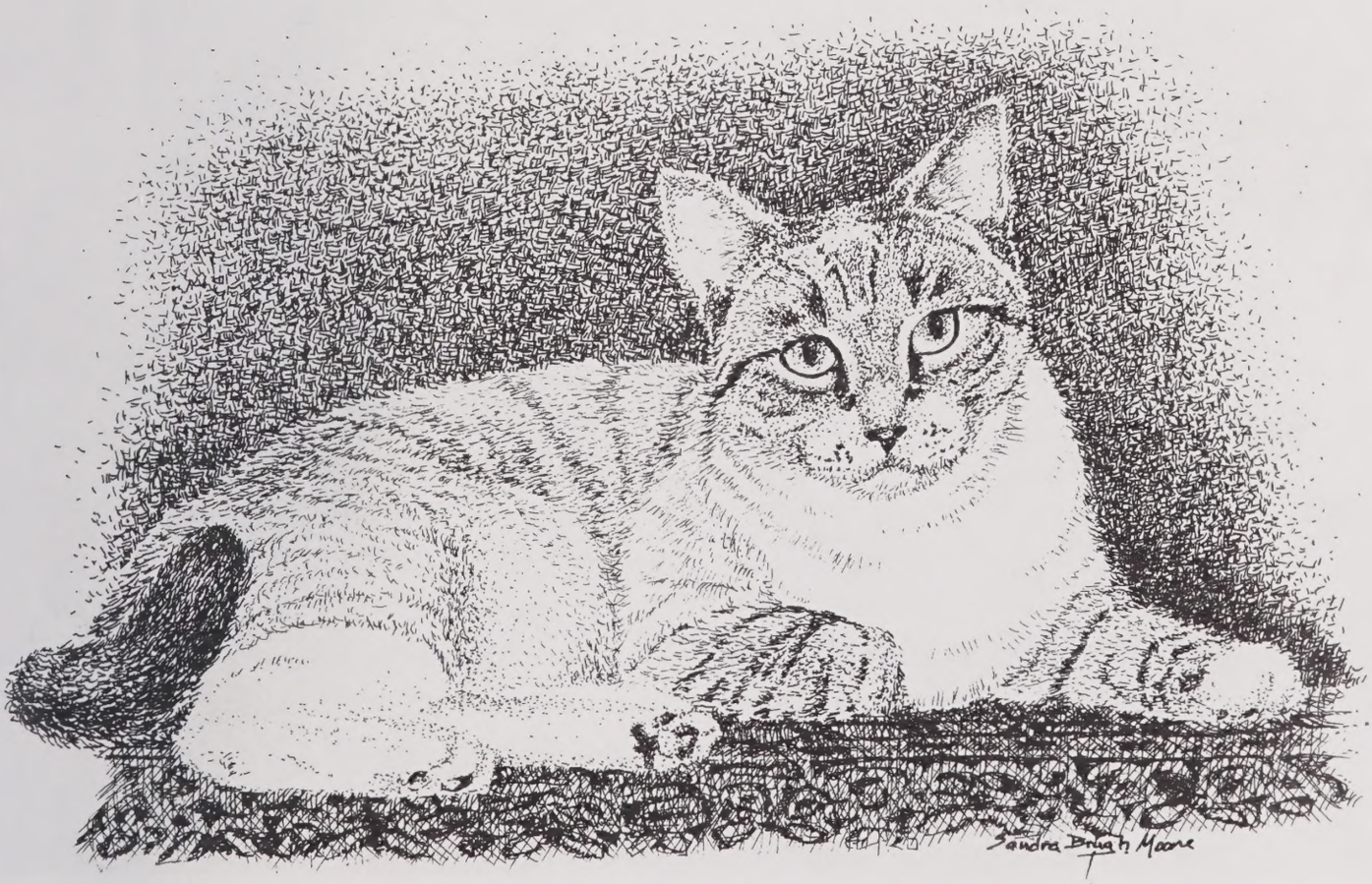
When we and the funeral director finished with the scientific part, I went and got the "casket" my mother had completely lined with white satin. It even had a little white satin pillow on which to lay the furry little head. Our project was beautiful. He looked so natural. So peaceful. He even had a smile on his face. Boy, were we proud and relieved!

On Monday when we went to school we had three posters telling the history of

embalming, the various techniques of embalming, and how we actually did the embalming. We had an eight-page research paper written with the most impressive bibliography we had ever seen. But the most important thing we had was our squirrel in his own handmade casket.

History teachers invited us into their classes to share what we had learned about how various cultures had preserved bodies down through the ages; our English teachers asked us to show our paper and tell how we had gathered such marvelous information (there was no encyclopedia entry) and give an oral report on what we had learned; but best of all Ms. Pappy and Mr. Walters were really impressed, and we both made "A++" on our project and paper. We did all right at the science fair. We were not asked to take our project to the regions or anything like that, but we were quite popular among our peers at Andrew Jackson High School, and that was good enough for us.

There is no way to let that be "The End" because remember the title is "A Cat Tale" and you do not know what happened to the cat. That big yellow cat made the best pet my mother and I ever had. We named him Tom. He lived eleven years after the garage incident, and he never held a grudge against me or Nelson. He did sort of smile whenever we got near him, though. There is nothing as smug as a cat who beats a human in a death match.



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

The Clothesline

Dara Llewellyn

Defined by my laundry chores, I wonder:
How many loads can I fit in this weekend?
Sheets, towels, colors, whites, piled on the floor
Waiting to be washed, dried, folded, and put away.

Carrying a load of sheets out to the clothesline,
I step carefully over chestnut burrs,
Pin the sheets to the line; watch the graceful flap in the wind,
Sharp flags of color against the green hemlocks.

When I stand at the clothesline, pinning exact corners,
I feel part of the ancient, feminine tradition,
Part of those who have always done the washing,
Stretching back in an unending line.

I remember the clotheslines of my childhood,
The pleasure I took when I could reach that high,
The importance I felt hanging out towels,
My own family chore.

Now, occasionally, I wish for a dryer,
To shorten the length of my tasks.
Yet, pinning each cloth to the clothesline
Feels like another bead on a rosary.

In this ritual I learned from my mother
I use the pins that she used.
She kept hers in a cloth bag.
I leave my pins on the line now.

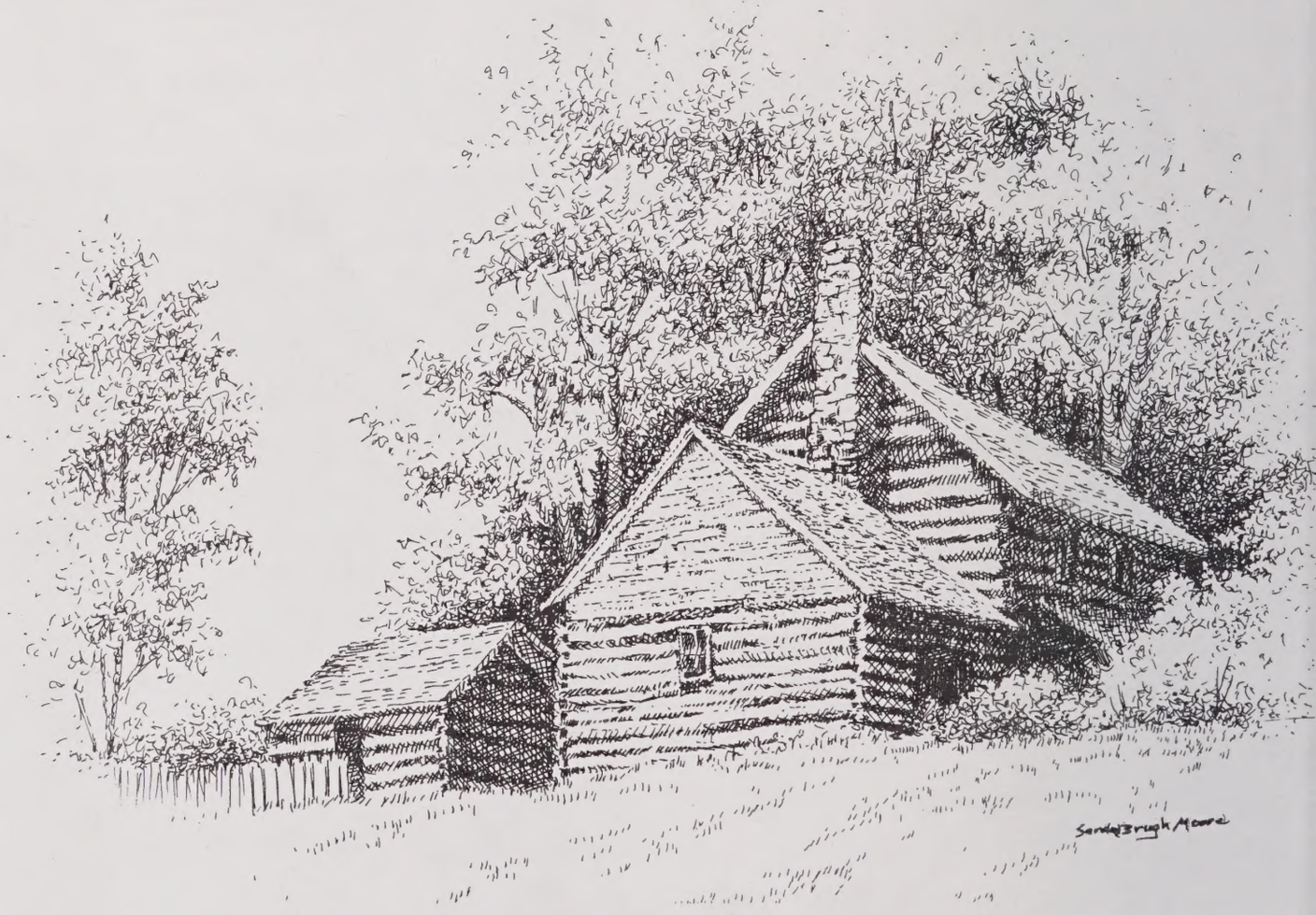
Occasionally, I buy new pins
Replacing the broken springs in my stock.
I marvel that the store still sells them,
Such simple tools—combined with a clothesline.

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Dream, Home, Love

Mollie Rubin (Rose)

Dream. Home. Love.
Child. Work. Walks. Sun.
Garden. Rocks. Water. Quiet.
Quiet. Walks. Water. Sun.
Dream. Home. Love.



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Goldwingers Going Somewhere

Celia H. Miles

Today I was shot through with a dart that entered as envy and emerged as wistfulness. It was a calm enough time. My husband and I were driving on I-40 in a damp drizzle that wasn't yet a hard rain. The car was warm. We were companionably quiet. I was working a crossword puzzle and had just learned a new word. My world was as serene and placid as a flat pancake—only I didn't realize it until we passed a convoy of Goldwings. Six of them traveling together. Each big machine held two persons—a man and a woman—and as we passed, I could look closely at each couple. These weren't Hell's Angels or teenagers or leather-clad, tattooed types. These were my types! At least in some ways chronological and physical. I saw plump grandmotherly cheeks, gray hair, glasses, solid and stout stomachs, some (surely) false teeth, some gray eyebrows.

They all had their rainsuits on, which may have added to their "filled out" quality, but clearly they weren't lean and mean boys and girls. One couple had on burgundy suits that matched exactly their Goldwing; and, of course, their helmets, glistening, polished, shedding raindrops, matched. They were talking into their microphones, oblivious to the murky day. The others wore bright yellow or orange suits, colors mostly matching their bikes. It couldn't have taken us more than a minute or so to pass them by, but they stayed with me. They all sat proudly, straight, comfortably. Not one looked irritated or disgusted with the weather. Well, I wasn't disgusted either. I like rain, but I was protected, ensconced in my steel and plastic buggy.

I didn't feel the rain on my face, the wind, didn't hear the sizzle as tires cut through the slick pavement.

Now common sense tells me that all six of those couples are not perfectly matched, perfectly happy, perfectly content, but my gut tells me something else. They seemed at one with each other, at one with the big bike, at ease with the world, rain be damned, we're enjoying ourselves! I suddenly felt older than my years, older than the bikers, older than the wet asphalt! I was returning to a cozy house, a quiet day—but the Goldwingers were going adventuring, slipping through the elements in style, not ignoring the rain and not protected entirely, meeting it and glorying in it. So what if I was safe and secure, happy, a whole day at my disposal. At that moment what I really wanted—really wanted—was to be on one of those Goldwings headed somewhere.

Harbinger

Nancy Dillingham

Late October
breeds bright bird leaves
flying outside my window

harvest's harbingers heaping
their heaviness upon me
with intimations of snow and sleep

Chronologically at least
it is not yet my autumn
still I feel compelled to rise
and wonder at their quick demise

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Her Sister's Shoes

Julia Nunnally Duncan

As I cleaned my mother's closet
to help her discard the worn,
make room for the new,
I tossed aside her shoes,
outdated pumps and slick-bottomed sandals,
while she busied herself in dresser drawers.
I opened a box and discovered
a pair of oxfords,
most discardable of all,
I thought:
short, plain, gray—
I cast them aside
maybe with a laugh, some remark.
Suddenly,
she snatched them
and held them to her;
"They're Ruby's shoes!" she cried
and told me
they were all she had of her sister
who died many years ago.

I remembered:
my kind, portly, gruff-speaking aunt,
a cigarette dangling from her mouth,
ashes always dangerously hanging—
a sort of Shelley Winters
who loved me like a daughter
she never had.
Fourteen I was when she passed—
she only a few years older
than I am now.
Yes, those shoes I recall:
work shoes for the textile mill;
ugly, functional,
yet they defined the simple nature
of the homely woman,
once a hazel-eyed beauty
much pursued in her time.

God, why do some people die so young?
Why do their hearts give way?
we'd asked then,
no comfort offered by preacher or kin.
All this I recall—
passing by her casket in the Victorian parlor
of our town funeral home;
standing in line amidst the suffocating perfume
of rose-encircled wreaths,
hearing my mother in front of me
wailing—
as she had wailed from her bedroom
the nights before.
From down the hall
I heard my father trying to comfort her—
Don't cry, don't cry—
in a tender voice
reserved mostly for his children.
I pressed my palms hard over my ears,
put my head under the covers
to shut out the horror.

All this—all this—
brought back by two mute shoes
best left alone
in my mother's closet.

Holocaust Museum

Rita Speltz

What I saw in those monumental halls
tortured my eyes to their bloodshot core.
If I could not have *seen* a thing
my ears would have suffered me
the agony of victims:
mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, grandfathers, grandmothers . . .

The questions rise up again,
in the air-conditioned comfort,
for strolling tourists.
Replicas on every floor,
exhibits of before and after,
cobblestones, walking bridges
built to segregate,
camp wooden-planked beds,
one on top of another, on top of another . . .
Shoes, piles of reeking old leather,
suitcases, cooking utensils, combs, prayer shawls,
old photographs of intense moments:
incredibly gorgeous faces,
plastering walls many feet high.

Images pound my entire body,
weakening me in the knees.
Continuously,
I shake my head,
incredulous,
to the ends of my fingers.

A baby,
when monsters ruled
in another part of this world,
I was not ripped
from my mother's arms,
but the questions
leave me
feeling
dead.

"And Jesus wept."

The statue of Jesus stands in foreground of Oklahoma City Memorial.

Surrounding the statue are columns—one for each of the victims of the bombing.
At back left is an untouched, rather new building.
In middle is the crane—reminding us of the destruction of the bombing
and the rebuilding of the memorial to those who died there.
At back right is the fence with memorabilia and messages
to the victims and their families and friends.

Photo by Beth Richardson Mitchell

Mardi Gras Haiku

Becki Janes

Go to New Orleans
Jambalaya in your heart
Voodoo me your soul

A Hole in One

Gerald Metz

Gray accent on pink!
Yang enveloped by yin!
Cold surrounded by warm!
Thick thrusting through thin!
The passive punctuates the lively, and
plainness perforates the lovely.
The uninhabited decorates the uninhibited as
Stark stainless steel springs unexpectedly
from secret places.

Hunting

Parker Lewis

My grandfather taught me more to fear a gun than to respect it. We were squirrel hunting in swampland stretching along the Altamaha River in southeastern Georgia in winter. The land is flood plain, supporting massive cypress, gum, pine and water oak. In winter these trees anchor the land in place, holding it against the rising waters of the river, keeping its topsoil out of the estuaries of the Atlantic, a mere sixty miles downriver.

As a boy I didn't know the monetary value or the function of the trees on this land, nor, I suppose, did I care too much. The place, to me, was magical. The trees were the biggest things I'd ever seen in my life, with canopies I could barely see, and they supported birds, snakes, chattering squirrels. Otter and beaver, perch, smallmouth bass and catfish swam in the coffee-colored water of the small ponds within the swamp. Cypress trees had knees, water oaks dropped acorns the size of golf balls, and I had seen alligators sunning themselves on the banks of the very pond on which I was floating.

To get there, Papa and I drove a battered Jeep an hour through sandy farms and smoldering clearings in the pine forests. He waved to farmers on their tractors or housewives in their yards, yet he would shake his head in silent reproach at the junk in the poor people's yards. We spoke little. Papa would point to a deer crossing a field if he saw one or the dark tip of a black snake as it disappeared into the roadside grass, but mostly he drove and I would sit and look out the window, amazed, sometimes depressed, by the endless rows of pine trees, the flat sandy soil, the black water sitting stagnant in roadside ditches.

At the entrance to the swamp was a locked gate. It was my job to open the gate and hold it open while Papa drove through. I then had to thread the heavy, rusty chain through the links of the gate and lock it behind us. It was my responsibility. I liked to imagine we were entering the forest of no return as we crept down a steep hill into the swamp.

Once parked, Papa would meticulously show me how to load my gun, how to carry it safely, how to check the safety, how to put in my earplugs. He would put a green cap over my blinding white hair, cover his own with a brown one, and we would set off in a direction Papa knew but I did not, and did not question.

Papa walked slowly, ponderously, stopping often to kneel close to the ground or look high up in the gray branches. He was aware of much that I was not. I wondered how long it would be before I got to shoot my gun, wondered how long before it would be okay for me to ask for something to eat. Hunting to me was a dark and mysterious thing, done only with men who expected children to put aside their childish ways if they were to come along.

Hunting to me, in the few times I had been before this trip, always meant being roused terribly early on cold mornings, long before the sun, fried-egg sandwiches, bitter coffee, my father and uncle unwashed and unshaven. I knew enough as a boy to know that hunting was something I was supposed to like, supposed to want to do. Riding crunched up in the cab of a truck, watching the sky turn a delicate blue, listening to the

men talk, I always felt excitement, but it was always mixed with a twinge of ominous worry.

My uncle had, at one time, held the title of World Champion Skeet Shooter. He won this title after shooting a competition while on crutches. The sign that announced your arrival in Baxely, Georgia, my father's hometown, also announced that this was the home of Bobby Lewis, "World Skeet Shooting Champion." I had, on those cold early mornings, terribly large shoes to fill.

I had seen boys, some younger than myself, local boys from this part of the world, who swaggered and spat, cussed and had no fear of the guns they were carrying. They looked like they were born in camouflage clothing. Their fathers and older brothers, uncles and cousins all had an easy singsong speech, and a careless way with guns. I knew with dismay, that I was not like them.

On this particular day, after we had been walking awhile, Papa stopped me and pointed to a spot on the ground. I saw turned-up leaves, exposed forest dirt, broken acorns. Papa saw a banquet table where many wild turkeys had recently feasted. Although we were not turkey hunting, Papa pulled a small wooden object out of his pocket and, using a similar looking stick, made strange clucking noises by drawing the stick along the underside of the object. He then cocked his ear for what would seem to me to be entirely too long, listening for something I knew I could never hear—the wind for all I knew—before putting these things back in his pocket and slowly walking off.

We continued this devilishly slow pace until we arrived somehow on the top of a small ridge. Here Papa finally rested, setting his gun against a tree and sitting in the dried leaves. I dropped down next to him wondering if I could finally ask about the candy bars we had brought with us. He produced them from his jacket pocket, along with some pecans and fruitcake wrapped in foil. I ate a candy bar; he, bites of fruitcake.

I could not contain my anticipation and boyish excitement. My feet spilled dry leaves as I shuffled my legs and fidgeted. Papa's look was enough to calm me down. He pointed down the ridge to a flat area of the forest. I followed his finger down until I found a raccoon. He was sitting on his hind legs, casually licking first one paw then the other as though they were covered with jam. Papa indicated my gun with his eyes and my heart raced. In my haste I knocked the gun to the ground from its leaning perch against a tree, but the raccoon was too far away to be startled by the sound.

I shouldered the gun just like he had shown me, slowly, closing my right eye when the stock reached my cheek. I could hear my own heart beating, and my breath was coming in short gasps. I found the raccoon at the end of the gun barrel, still sitting and licking his paws, and I sighted the barrel's bead at the animal.

"Squeeze the trigger. Don't pull it. Keep your eyes open," I told myself. I held the barrel on the animal for a long time. He slowly shifted forward onto all fours and walked off. I continued holding the gun on the spot where the raccoon had just been. My cheek began to burn. I set the gun down slowly against a tree. I was both ashamed and relieved. While aiming my gun at the creature, I remembered reading that raccoons can pick up food with their front paws and eat it much like we do and that they prefer to sit by water so they can dip their food in as they eat.

I was afraid to look to Papa. When I finally did, he seemed to have a joyless smile. I don't think he wanted me necessarily to shoot the raccoon, but I think perhaps he

wanted to know that I was capable of shooting a raccoon.

We had come here on this day to hunt squirrels, but a winter wind high in the trees had kept the squirrels out of sight. We descended the ridge in the general direction the raccoon had walked; perhaps it was the way we had come, but I had no idea. Our pace was quicker and I imagined Papa's being disgusted with my failure. He stopped and looked around less frequently.

I noticed that he had stopped and was pointing toward the canopy of a tree. Again I looked in the direction his finger was indicating and saw a mass of twigs and leaves: a squirrel's nest. Papa handed me his gun, an ancient shotgun that until now was not for me to shoot. I set my gun aside and took up his. Its barrel was scratched and its wooden stock worn smooth by years of fingers. It was heavy and scary. I raised the gun to my shoulder, too scared to remind myself of the procedures, released the safety and saw Papa out of the corner of my eye. He had turned away and stuck his two middle fingers into his ears. I fired blindly upward, closing my eyes long before my finger ever tightened over the trigger.

Instantly my jaw stung, my shoulder ached, my eyes watered, and my ears rang numbly. I looked down and saw a thin curl of smoke coming out of the discharged shell. My mouth tasted like gunpowder. I looked up and saw the same tangled mass of twigs and leaves, exactly as it had been before I fired.

I gave the gun back to Papa. We walked silently back to the Jeep, my ears ringing, feeling as though they could be bleeding. At the top of the hill, on the outside of the swamp, Papa talked to a man in coveralls with pink skin splotched with brown, a hog farmer he once told me with a noticeable degree of respect. They talked about the rain, and they talked about the mild winter and what would soon be, in this warm climate, an early spring planting. I stood under Papa's hand, politely nodding to the man when he indicated he was talking to me, all the while imagining tiny baby squirrels being ripped apart while sleeping, their mother returning, her cheeks packed with acorns, to find an empty nest.

There is a photograph somewhere in a shoebox. In it my father and uncle stand with a pale winter sun behind them. Their hunting caps are askew on their heads, and their insulated shirt sleeves are pushed above their elbows. Their hands are darkened with dried blood. They hold between their opposing arms a rope upon which a dozen or so squirrels hang by their tied front legs. They are young looking, much younger than I ever remember them looking, and they are smiling proudly.

Photo by Mary McClurkin

J.C. Feeds His Cats

Will Hooper

J.C. feeds his cats at noon—
dog-eared and quick
with kinks in their tails—
Strays, they just show up.
He feeds them and they stay—
A mountain pile of gravy, biscuits, beans and bacon.
They feed on top of the old green well house
next to the porch in the shade.

Hazel used to feed J.C.
Now her swollen toes won't let her—
J.C. feeds her nowadays.
Sausage, ham and grits, gravy, jelly and biscuits.
On Sundays their nine kids with their kids
come and bring food for everybody—
and them kids run and play like their parents
did in J.C. & Hazel's yard.
They run and chase and fight and hide and seek
and they break up into favorite groups—
some go fishing,
some play ball in the field,
some walk in the tall grass by the river,
some watch the game on tv
and talk to Hazel in her bed and J.C.
at the table next to his Crisco spittoon

and they smile and say "Daddy, when'd you start likin' cats?"
and he says "I don't!"
and they say "Well why you feedin' 'em then?"
and he says "Hell, somebody's got to!" and he grins and he spits.
and they laugh and know not to mess with Daddy's cats.

In the evening J.C. sits by Hazel's bed
and holds her swollen knuckle hands and kisses her cheek
when his swollen heart lets him as a patch of light sneaks
through the dusty curtained window and it looks like
a patch of butter on the wall to him.
And they remember when her feet and his heart let them
picnic by the river at midnight—fried chicken, beans and biscuits—
and they watched the water bubble and glisten and dip and swirl
'neath a stonewhite moon.

John Calvin feeds his cats at noon.

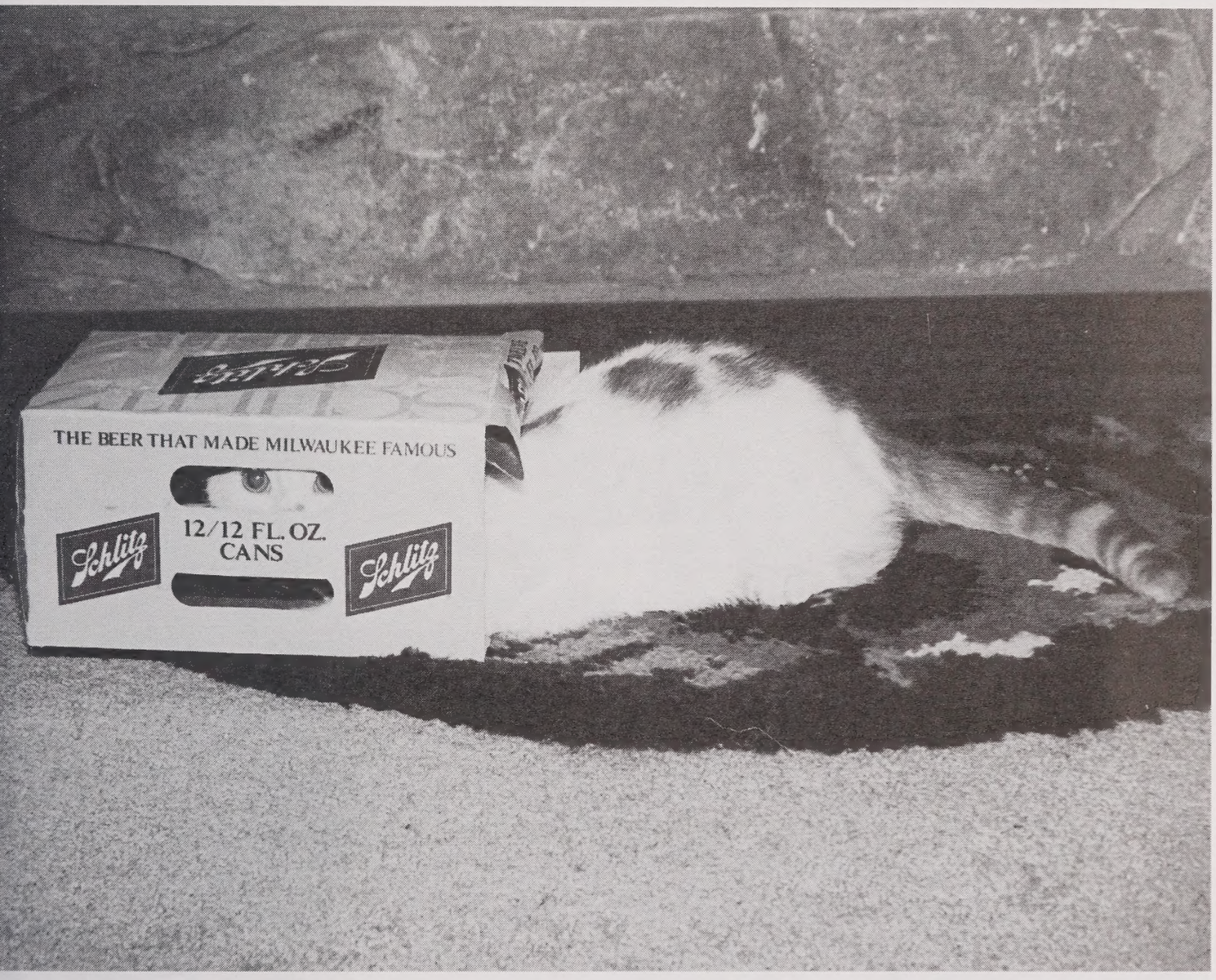


Photo by Mary McClurkin

The Angel with Black Wings

Sue Wright Barron

We waited dreadfully for months and years to meet you face to face.
What would it mean to actually have you at our place?
All day long our anticipation was steady,
But when you arrived I was not ready.
The bread was not laid;
The tea was not made.
We were sore afraid.
You came anyway
To rob and slay.
Go away!
Away!

Photo by Celia H. Miles

Joyce

Celia H. Miles

I didn't want to think
the sweet potato tasted sweet
the butter teased my tongue
and the cornbread, light inside,
was crisp and browned just right.

A bad accident, life-flighted to surgery, they said,
to relieve the swelling, to ease the blood clot in the brain,
A drug-induced coma to sedate the patient, a family in a sedated
state in the hospital halls, at the coffee machine, at the pay phone
and in the quiet chapel with its dark green cushioned pews and
cool brass cross, low lights, its calligraphy scripture on the walls.

We didn't want to eat, four hundred miles from the family, four hundred
and fifty-eight miles from the skid marks and the battered railing and the
milepost marker
forever engraved in her mother's, and daddy's, and brother's minds. But we did
and wondered
that our throats didn't choke, our hearts didn't shatter, our chests, though filled
with sighs, kept breathing; we washed the dishes, wandered through the house,
returned to the e-mail:

Joyce passed away at 8:45; arrangements incomplete at this time.

Arrangements would never
be complete again.

Long-Haired Boy

Julia Nunnally Duncan

Today I think of you
my savior,
my blond friend and lover,
whose image was created
in my lonely girlhood mind.

Through the years my heart
has been tossed and tumbled.
I have wanted to die
and longed to live;
I have regressed into past lives
I'd hoped to have experienced,
but arrived back here
in my small-town Southern life.
I've hardly thought of you
until now,
and today
the sharp breeze of mid-September
that stirs my windchimes
and waits for woodsmoke
to lift into October skies
reminds me of you.
Of you, I think
and wonder
and look at pastures I pass
and recall how I waited for you
to rise from the crest of a hill
to walk down to me.
I still look.
I still wait.

Once I watched for you
on the festive streets of Asheville,
thought I passed you at Christmastime.
Is it you? I asked
when a young man passed
in turtleneck and bellbottoms,
whose hair hung on his shoulders,
who hummed "Kicks."
Where are you,
oh long-haired boys of my girlhood?
Where are you,
my own long-haired boy?
Is your hair now gray;
is your brow now furrowed?
I don't care—
I still look.
I still wait.

Lilac Buds

Randee Brenner Goodstadt

Heavy frost, late October
And I am surveying the damage.
Blackened dahlias, zinnias and blue basil, to be sure.
Shriveled nasturtiums which barely had a chance at life
Thanks to another hot and droughty summer
(In spite of tropical appearance, they're actually happiest when it's not hot.
Among the odd lessons of a gardener.)
Hardier flowers may still live and even bloom again,
Could have one last flush of roses,
And the tiny sweet alyssum hugging the earth
Seem utterly unconcerned about this morning's 28 degrees.

Winter's chill in the air despite a glorious sun,
And I shudder to think of the long cold and dark weeks ahead.
Then amazing, miraculous and wonderful!
I see that after three years of tender care
The four-foot lilac at last has several buds.

Why do I love gardening?
The promise of future beauty
Even when it seems
The least likely.

Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

Like Yesterday I'm Young Again

Nancy L. Williams

Like yesterday I'm young again
Skipping down the stone-worn steps
Of our humble brownstone, mundane
Lines and peaks, softened
By the seasons, sweetened,
Mellowed by memories,
Yellowed and dog-eared as old photos.

The sun beats gently on my white socks
And stiff black patent leather shoes,
Warming the winter-weary toes of my soul.
I'm a little Barbie doll in my satin dress,
Crowned with straw hat and ribbon banners,
Playing little princess dress-up for Dad.
He sweeps down the stoop, leonine and regal,
Carrying my Easter basket of Sugar Daddies,
Green plastic grass and rainbow eggs,
Pale imitation to an awakening world.
Dad is in his wooly suit and starched bow tie,
For all the world a silly clown
But all the same a god to me.

He ushers in the sluggish spring with
Our Easter rite-of-winter passage,
Making it official, for now
I can smell the sweet smell of
Humus-peat, blending with peach tree
Blossoms and locust lavenders.
The earth is alive again,
Alive like my heart,
Alive like I was then.

On Communication
(in the style of James Kavanaugh)

Gerald Metz

I've been afraid of talk,
afraid to speak the truth of what I feel
because there is a chance
that such expression could destroy us.

We both know well that honesty can be a weapon
but it's not a need for bluntness that impels me,
only to be open with myself and you.

I've learned by now there are some talks
best shared most quietly with God alone
so this is not a wish to "tell it all"
just the hope for a chat over the fence,
instead of a muffled shout from behind a wall.

If we match the chance that truth could end us
against the certainly that silence will,
I'd say, "let's talk," and pray for flowers
after the rain.

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

A One-Egg Cake

Dara Llewellyn

My sister and I learned to cook
Making a one-egg cake.
In Mama's big yellow bowl
We stirred the batter with a wooden spoon.

Add one egg to flour,
Sugar, butter, and vanilla,
Necessary ingredients for cake
And, Presto! Our after-dinner dessert.

We took secret licks and argued—
About who would lick the spoon
Or scrape the bowl
Of the rich, creamy batter.

My sister made one cake
And decided she'd had enough.
I made one cake and decided
I was the Madame Curie of cuisine.

I could walk in our kitchen,
Tie on my cross-stitched apron,
And create wonderful compounds
Out of my powders and liquids.

Once I mistook salt for sugar.
They're both white crystals!
Daddy gamely swallowed a bite.
The rest got tossed out.

One June I discovered food coloring.
My favorite mix was blue and green.
Blue cakes with green icing
Graced our table all that summer.

If only I had known
How many meals to cook were before me.
If I had known of the endless dishes ahead,
Would I ever have broken that first egg?

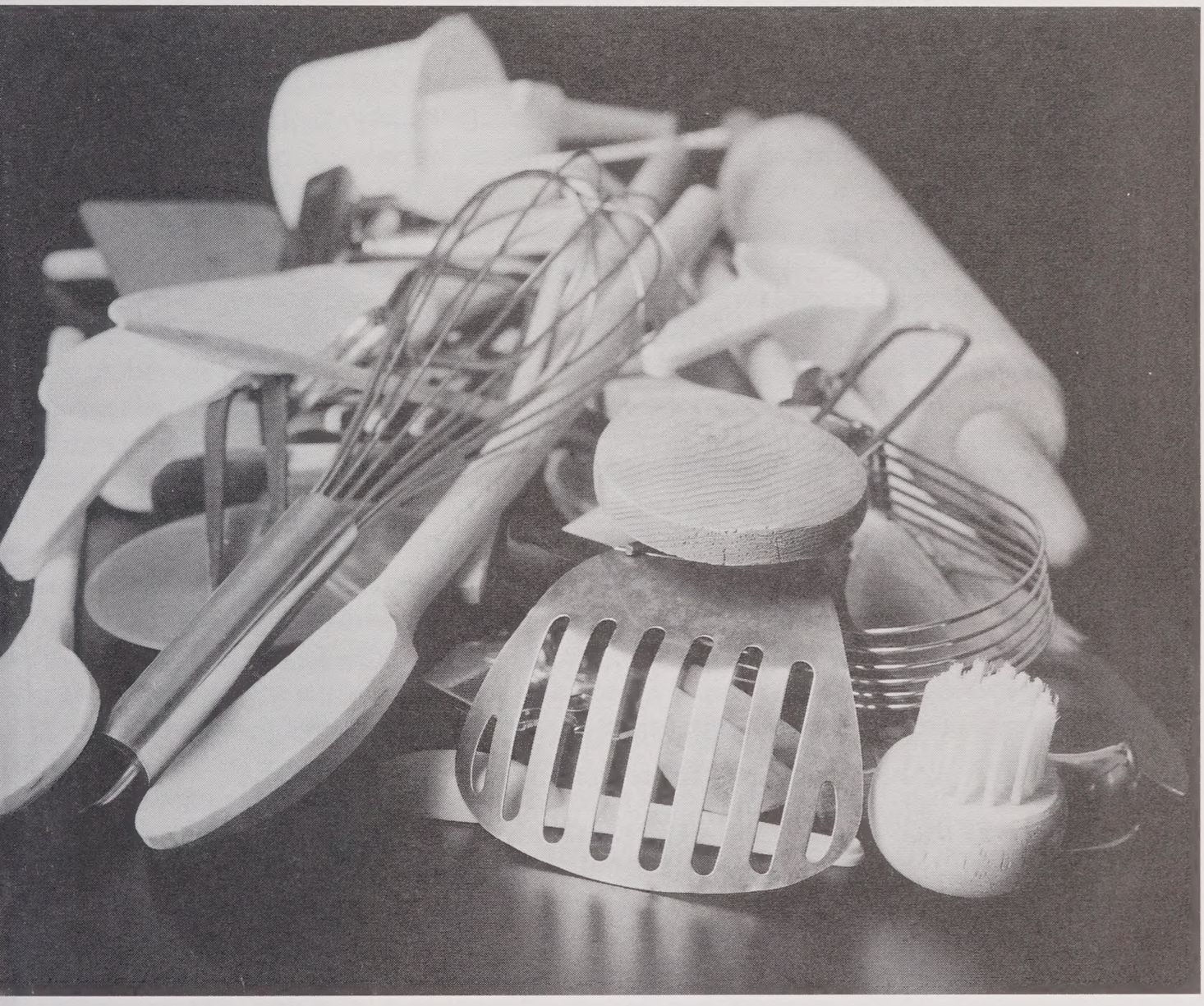


Photo by Robert O. Parriott

LeAnn Gets Lonely

Bill Brooks

Saturday nights they dance at the
VFW Hall where there's a picture of
Billy Westfall and other men who died
In war, heroes before they got old.

The music's loud and only one kind:
Country & Western: George Jones,
Merle Haggard, Emmylou Harris, all
Those. And every Saturday night LeAnn
Gets lonely and goes and dances with any
Man who will ask her and they all have

One time or another and some she's gone
Home with after and woken in the morning
Startled and disappointed in life and the way
It treats you when you are unattached, as they say.

Some of them have moustaches and some
Thinning hair and some have crooked teeth
& beer bellies, and some are married to other
Women left lonely on Saturday nights stuck
Home with the kids and TV and long distance
Calls to their mammas in Florida. Some are
Women she works with at the factory. Girlfriends.

But you know, loneliness is a powerful thing
She tells herself those Sunday mornings when she
Hears the bell ringing in the sheep down at the
Baptist church, and can't always be helped.

Like it was its own sort of sin, like—"Thou
Shall Not Be Lonely"—and goes and brushes
Her teeth with her finger and tap water because
She hadn't planned on another night with some
Man in the Blue Moon Motel again. A toothbrush
In her purse would make her seem desperate.

& she realizes that all the really good songs
Are about love and other sad monsters and someday
The headlines in the local paper will read: War Hero's
Wife Found Dead of an Apparent Suicide.
But until then, LeAnn will just get lonely.

Pastiche

Bill Findley

One day last semester, while exploring Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" with my first-year literature class at A-B Tech, I surprised myself by suddenly blurting, "Two paths? Two paths diverged? Why two? Why not eight, or ten? The choice is never that clear, is it?" After several long, silent, fidgety moments, Tina finally said, "Hellllloooo, Mr. Findley, that's your poem; you can't accuse him of writing the wrong one, can you? Isn't that some sort of fallacy or something?" Nice of her to let me down easy. But I liked my question; it was more personally engaged than the typical text-centered question. Also, such impolitic explosions are useful, for they often lead to other discoveries, and I've been mulling over the exchange ever since—writing my own poem, as Tina suggested.

My poem would have eight or ten paths because, unlike Frost's speaker, I usually don't even know I've taken a particular path at all, much less one that diverged from another, until, or, more accurately, unless, I turn around and see it snaking away behind me. I seem very often to take action just for change's sake, for the heart-pounding anticipation of the unexpected and without thinking of the deeper consequences. Change restores and invigorates me. But I seem to need rather a lot of it. I have Attention Overflow Disorder; I'll pay attention to anything and I want to experience everything. For example, recently, on a whim, I moved to Asheville from California, where I had grown up and spent most of my adulthood. I didn't really know why I wished to move. Asheville had a closeness to outdoor activities I thought I would enjoy. More than anything else, though, it just felt right. I made a quick trip out here for a job interview and made the arrangements, and I certainly haven't been disappointed. But as time has passed, a vague realization has dawned that this time perhaps I was addressing a more fundamental purpose. I felt a visceral urge to be someplace where I could examine my life, alone, to find out what made me tick and to answer some questions about myself. Why do I seem to need change? Shouldn't I be repeating my experiences to some extent, carving out An Existence, instead of skittering across the surface of life? A man entering middle age should have a stable life. Instead, things happen to me; I attach myself to an offering only for a shadowy moment, or, much less frequently, I shake off the passivity and grab on like the hand of death. But it's always to something else, something other, a reaching out, never a rooting down. I move, but am I really getting anywhere?

The questions eddied about for a few months, swinging out in the current briefly, then stalling at the edge of the pool. Then some weeks ago, while going through a box of old magazines, I picked up a *New Yorker* and began reading an appreciation of the American composer Leonard Bernstein written by David Denby, the magazine's theater critic. He made some observations about Bernstein that hit home.

Leonard Bernstein was an American original—a pianist, composer, and conductor of both the Vienna and New York Philharmonic Orchestras, among others. What distinguished him from other classical composers of his time, the post-war 40s through the 70s, was his enormous range of interests. He was equally appreciative of both symphonic music and popular artists like Simon and Garfunkel, Elvis, and the Beatles. He was also a gifted teacher, conducting youth orchestras around the world and creating an outstanding television series called "Young People's Concerts" which I watched rather wide-eyed as a youngster, surprised to find that those boring symphonies my parents dutifully took me to could actually be interesting and fun. In his long career, he fused together in various ways elements of European classical music, American folk, bebop and abstract music and ballet of the postwar years, Broadway musicals (*West Side Story*), rock and roll, and film scores (*On the Waterfront*). A bit like me, he seemed to want to take part in everything. As Denby says, his temperament burst all categories. He scandalized the old guard with his eclectic approach, and critics vilified his attempts to combine symphonic culture

with popular music, calling it exhibitionism, accusing him of salesmanship and "cultural vaudeville." They were right; he was an entertainer the likes of which America had never seen. He rose to prominence just as television and the long-playing record were becoming mass media, and he reached an enormous audience. Yet in the end, despite an illustrious, a really remarkable career, he felt himself unfulfilled because he hadn't been able to sustain the writing of a defining, monumental symphonic work. On his deathbed he told a friend, "If I knew what I wanted to say, I wouldn't be sitting here now."

Bernstein's tumultuous, many-faceted personality interested me, and as I read I began to connect Bernstein's life with mine, to sort of appropriate Denby's view of Bernstein for my own needs, as we sometimes do when we read. And when Denby speculated as to why Bernstein was unable to achieve the brilliance he was after, I found a parallel with my life. Denby states: "Bernstein said, over and over again, that thematic 'development' was the grea contribution of Western music [such as the variations on the first movement, and the first four notes, of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony—dadadaDA, which in astonishing inversions become the opening movement]." About Bernstein's work, Denby observes that "Bernstein created big statements on big themes, but most of his serious work he patched together from many sources, so most of his serious work lacks the toughness and rigor of great modern music. . . . He flirts with dissonance, with stridency, with harshly disconsolate moods ["modern" motifs] but he doesn't develop these gestures into the kind of formal structures that might raise them above mere portentous statements. . . . But perhaps a composer can generate an entire piece out of a few notes—as Beethoven did in the opening movement of the Fifth Symphony—*only by possessing a consciousness that rejects virtually everything except the possibilities of manipulating F's and E-flats. 'Development' requires intellectual unity: a man possessing many selves will instinctively wander into pastiche.*" [Italics mine.]

Pastiche in music is a piece consisting wholly or chiefly of motifs or techniques from borrowed sources. But pastiche in life! Perfect! What a find! My life has been pastiche—a pinch of this, a pinch of that, living here one year, there the next, with this or that person or group and this or that job. Copying personal styles of friends whom I idolized and studied, emulating teaching techniques, copying others' lesson plans. I'm living a puff-pastry life, all surfaces and texture, many selves layered together, inflated with hot air and done to airy thinness. And yet it still looks and sounds good: French, artful, civilized. How good to emote, grasping one's forehead, "At best, my life has been a pastiche." Much better than "My life has become a hollow, gaseous, sweet nothing." Denby's work provided some answers but also led to more questioning: So how do I find that "formal structure," or at least a measure of it? Can I create the unified consciousness Denby writes of? How much of life's offerings do I reject in order to achieve something of my own, something not borrowed, but really, essentially, mine? Am I capable of rejecting anything at all? Is it all "immediate gratification"? But then again, hey, if it was all right for Lenny, it's all right for me. I mean, Bernstein's pastiche was more creative and consumed than I might be at my most unified. Still, there was that last haunting line, the one from his deathbed . . .

I hurried forward, humming along in the grip of the character study. In suggesting pastiche as a defining metaphor for Bernstein's life, Denby asserts that Bernstein's greatness was in part precisely this instinct for gathering ideas from many, often contradictory, sources, for constructing significant work from so varied a mix. That Bernstein wasn't one to command his intellect to focus on only a few notes, that his range was wider than it was deep, Denby doesn't dispute. But Denby reveres him for trying to take on so much, for wringing the most out of existence in his fashion. In fact, Bernstein saw something about America that his critics didn't see, and today he is credited for the very thing that his critics crucified him for: his multicultural approach. He was one of the few voices in the arts who was successfully bridging the widening cultural gap between serious classical music, which for the younger generation (me) "no longer fulfilled its old American role as a form of cultural aspiration," and popular music. With music his language, he pioneered our modern ideal of

inclusiveness in the arts and, by extension, in all areas of society. He continually worked to resolve the "contraries" between classical and the new music by engaging his audience in intense musical and spoken conversations about the two rather than keeping them in separate and opposing camps. To couch it in more political terms, he made the familiar, the daily "low-culture" life, serious and acceptable, validating youthful voices, kids like Mike Rose's friends from the boundary, kids who were feeling snubbed by the heavy hand of a powerful, paternalistic cultural authority. Rose's marginalized buddies were from a different socioeconomic strata from me, and from my students at A-B Tech, for the most part, but the need for the young to be taken seriously cuts across all boundaries. This need simply exists, not as something to be proven or earned by making good grades or, in the insidious current phrase, "Taking responsibility for your actions," the import of which seems to be "Marry young, get a job, have kids, and support the church of your choice."

A major goal in my composition course is to facilitate students' broadening their participation in their culture as a means of taking action in a democracy. This might be thought of as the unifying aspect of the unification-pastiche dichotomy, but early in the semester I want them to delay such unifying closure. I want to help them tap into their natural, youthful exuberance and curiosity. In the first weeks, my energy bends like a dowser's rod toward freewriting, brainstorming, and drafting, encouraging students simply to move forward in their thinking and writing, privileging the creative over the critical, letting the product take shape only after much creative drafting. I try to empower my students by holding up their received ideas, even relatively whimsical ones, as worthy of exploration in essay assignments exploring a role they play, and in analyzing print advertisements, and in writing about the assumptions which underpin the wellsprings of behavior in their families and communities, and in assignments that involve interviews with people and situations that interest them. I consider my efforts a success if I've stimulated students to continue learning. I want them, especially early on before we begin to attend to writing argument, to be aware of the opportunities for meaning-making which evolve from their writing, to create meaning out of experience. They must let the world in, "try on" new ideas and borrow from others, allow for pastiche, but be metacognitively aware of their activity as I am only just now becoming aware of the elements of pastiche in my life. Life is something that they must let happen to them as well as something they must control.

Pastiche is The Bomb! More and more often I exhibit the Bernstein Impulse, scrapping the day's lesson plan (my students soon learn my syllabus is tentative) and cobbling together something at the last minute, trying to match the day's tasks with the most recent work from my students, work from a previous day's class leading into the next day's lesson. I lurch down the hallways with gobs of manila folders spilling apart, filled with possibilities, part security blanket and part ammunition for the elusive "right" moment—and often not used at all. But I want to be attuned, prepared to catch hold of any illuminative moment, to follow the class's progress in the most organic fashion, pasting my stuff to their stuff in ways that will eventually, hopefully, draw together from chaotic beginnings an organized essay. I encourage students from the beginning (after ten years, I know to start early) to allow themselves to express contraries in their drafting, to play "Believing" and "Doubting" games, to first discover and then embrace the ambiguities inherent in their lives, as embracing them is the first step in controlling them; to discover a point of view and then allow themselves the possibility of discarding some or all of it for another, stronger one, partly in the hope of revealing the tentative and contingent nature of knowledge which is, in the American philosopher Richard Rorty's neat phrase, "socially justified belief." Students in early stages of cognitive growth who are searching for True Authority resist this openness, are anxious about the ideas that scatter across the pages uncontrolled and unconcluded, and papers are sometimes late, but "good faith efforts" are many, and those who in the beginning of the semester feel that they have little to say and want to know how many pages they must fill often end up at my side a few weeks later as Cassandra did this week: "Mr. Findley, I can't stop this; I've

got all these pages" (thumbing through an impressive stack). I tell her to keep going until she feels like it's "finished." I'll extend the deadline. I'm quietly ecstatic as she stands next to me enthusiastically making decisions, "Maybe I'll type this up"; more thinking; "Yeah , I' type this up," she says, with a slight but perceptible gathering in her voice. "Yes, type that u and we'll look at it and see where it goes." At her level of experience and skill, the important thing is to keep going forward; the attempts to resolve will come. Take the eight or ten paths that diverge in the hidden wood. But is this asking too much of students? Am I behaving recklessly? After all, there's a real danger in leaving them out there; these are ofte students who want and need structure, not because they are used to (an overabundance of) in high school, but also because they may not have the metacognitive capacity, or the life experience and scope, to embrace such uncertainty. I wonder. I must create assignments which privilege wide-ranging inquiry of this sort but which don't stretch the boundaries too far, which stay within the zone at which they can succeed, but need a teacher's help.

Leonard Bernstein is by now a boon companion. It isn't simply that he succeeded so we in resolving the musical generation gap, and that Denby interpreted it, thus giving shape to my rationale. What also intrigues me, in view of my peripatetic background, is the characte trait that had him attempting this formidable task, something that goes beyond teaching to life itself. Denby states: "What was unusual was the strength of the contraries within Bernstein, and his eagerness to act on all of them at once. He was more energized, rather than paralyzed, by ambivalence." Here was another answer to my nagging questions: There something of this sort of energy in me, too. Ambivalence is something I struggle with, two generations after Bernstein, because life holds so many choices, a chance to be so many "selves," and I want to grab them all so I don't miss anything. Certainly today, if we are interested in the search for "intellectual unity," the paralysis of which Denby speaks is more of a danger than two generations ago. The sheer volume and variety of social demands, let alone economic pressures, create more anxiety than ever. Yet if I don't struggle for meaning I run the risk of becoming overwhelmed with the choices available and thus squander my potential; I trade the temporary struggle with self-doubt for the very secure winding-sheet o an unrealized life, for a paralysis which keeps me from venturing beyond a lifestyle that limi my "becoming." I am using this anxiety, this excess, this disunity, this disharmony, tapping into the energy created by the ambivalence. And surely I am better equipped than Americans of previous generations to deal constructively with this ambivalence, better able to create a unity which will sustain me in my attempt to create a rounded life. Although my essay has so far concerned itself with finding whatever is "essential" in myself, I am also informed by its "contrary," as expressed in social constructivist theories that have become a staple of my early composition class mini-lectures—that throughout life, in the early stages of learning anything, we "patch together" an intellectual unity; we need people, culture, to provide models from which we borrow Identities until, instead of allowing the models to lead, we can take the lead, sufficiently aware of our own needs and desires to do our own creating from our own inner resources.

When I first began living alone, about four years ago, after experiences with roommates over the years and more significant others, I tended to oversimplify, and life degenerated to sluggish, uninspired monotony. The negatives weighed heavily: the occasional loneliness, the quiet, the lack of structure which my social life had provided to give a shape to my days and nights. I then compounded the situation by moving across the country where I was eve more apart, and for awhile I lived like a cloistered monk. In a new place, the opportunities for inspiration do abound, but so do opportunities for "expiration," in slow, rhythmic snuffling snores on the couch at mid-day, the seduction of nap-time overwhelming the desire for self-improvement. Intending to simplify, I just subsisted, simplifying by stuffing all sorts of things into closets and behind doors and under the bed. I tended to "let things go"—magazines tossed on the floor, papers unsorted and tossed into boxes in a corner of the spare bedroom, laundry spilling out of the basket, dustballs wafting across the living room floor.

Once or twice I caught myself rationalizing that it was easier to let the dust gather and then pick it up by hand rather than use the unwieldy vacuum cleaner.) I comforted myself by calling the mess "an agreeable clutter." Now I see it as a fallow period, perhaps necessary after the dramatic change of address, a necessary passivity.

I began to snap out of it this Christmas, when a small, insistent inner voice suggested I hunker down at home for the semester break instead of leaving town for a few days as I usually do. Energized by the ambivalence, the tension, and still needing a change, I began to resolve contraries without realizing it. I needed to do something—anything—yet I also felt the need to maintain a bit of self-discipline. I decided to invest in *The Joy of Cooking* and some kitchenware. Suddenly, life was good! In the kitchen I could safely resolve contraries in a meaningful way (and pamper myself at the same time). I began resolving the contraries of, on the one hand, recipes perfected to the letter (rigor), and, on the other, entire Chicken Parmigiana dinners for eight consumed alone in two days (gesture). I countered the contrary of eating on the run (a pastiche lifestyle) by cooking my meals (evidence of intellectual unity). Now with my more inclusive outlook, what I had thought might be a character flaw is reinvented as one pole in a dialectic, ambiguity as ethical compass. If I stray into pastiche, at least it's pastiche with intent. After a day's work, I can be gloriously selfish, completely free of others' wishes and needs. I can veer toward a golf course or head down to the river and stay out till the last trout rises in the late evening. And with my wide-open social calendar, I'm free to await, and then immediately act upon, any sudden inspiration—a spur-of-the-moment gallery tour after a lengthy lunch, the spirits imbibed carrying over to create inspired interpretations of the excellent artwork in Asheville's excellent galleries. Or, after a long walk alone during the winter's first good snow on the closed-down Blue Ridge Parkway, I might feel free to discharge excesses of feeling in a "First-Snowfall-Pub-Crawl." (Start at the bar in closest proximity to the point at which your car can no longer climb the hill into downtown; this winter's snowy Friday, the starting line was "Tunatini's." Next year, interested persons may meet on the day of the first snow at 4 pm on the Parkway, Hendersonville Road exit.) Or I might stumble across a piece of junk that needs refinishing, or just curl up till the wee hours with a book. I might veg on the couch flicking the remote instead of going out to enrich my life by seeing a play, going to a gallery, hearing live music, or taking salsa lessons; and laziness (informed laziness, mind you) sometimes causes me to miss out on highbrow pursuits which should occupy a bigger part of my schedule—culturally uplifting historical tours, symphonies, dinner parties for eight—the higher arts. But I'm in tune with the process, trying to qualify the pastiche nature of my life now, finding a balance between home life and social life, employing appetites for work and for play, unifying the appetites and expectations.

Denby concludes: ". . .[T]he conclusion of this success story is painfully ambiguous. To the end, Bernstein remained a violently divided spirit—split not just between his loyalties to America and to Europe but, in his own person, between his sense of obligation, which led him to be very publicly a Jew, a heterosexual, and a composer of serious music, and his need for pleasure, which led him to be a flamboyant conductor, a homosexual, a fantastic talker about music, and a Broadway showman. It may seem a paradox that a man so disharmonious within himself would try to bring everyone together. But a more unified person could not have raised so many hopes, touched so many people. Whirling about, Bernstein showed his face, at least momentarily, to nearly everyone who wanted to derive some energy from wherever his gaze happened, at that moment, to land."

I have the feeling that Mr. Bernstein would not have considered the heat [energy] of his gaze as important as the results. I do know that as a teacher, I wish to touch people's lives, to raise hopes. But I also believe that one must work, accomplish, achieve, make something lasting. A commitment to the process of embracing contraries is not enough. We need the product. Embracing without attempting to finish seems almost cowardly now in view of Bernstein's heroic efforts to do both. Bernstein, who accomplished so much, sometimes

despaired that he didn't have time "to find himself." I have given myself that time, though I don't feel that I have asserted myself as I could have. Yet I am pleased to find that I now have a clearer perspective on how to manage my life and a greater acceptance of my inner needs.

Obligation and pleasure, unity and pastiche. Pastiche is the hot outward glance, the grasping at straws; unity, the cooling force that draws together. And this essay has become an exercise in resolving the pastiche of many scattered ideas, begun in the narrative mode and resolved toward traditional academic discourse. I began writing on a late fall evening, sitting on my back porch, freewriting, just as a gigantic, clumsy beetle smacked into the wall, then launched itself, clattering like a small helicopter and weaving drunkenly toward the angelic lightening bugs rising from the grass across the way. All of which seems to have nothing to do with the finished essay. But perhaps the meandering nature of its flight? Its quest for beauty? See, that's already quite a lot.

Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

Plus Ça Change

Gerald Metz

Spring slept with Massachusetts last night.
I smelled her breath in Maine this morning—
Scent of lusty giving. Yes!
She's on her way!
My coat's off:
Come, girl! I'm ready for you, too!

The time of buds is not for frogs.
White weasels never meet the ants.
Minds, too, know a season's change
And hearts have tides.
Beware, then:
Today well-loved, tomorrow, left!

Since last I saw you my tide's turned.
My boat has come about: yours sails
Onward, and you're out of sight.
Your iron "yes"
Is rusted:
It cannot crush my granite "no!"

Ravenous

Will Hooper

You just stand there
swerving that rifle
like an extended finger
pretending not to remember
that time we hunted squirrels
after the first frost—
ol' Fred, he treed three of them—
pinned halfway up an old oak.
You held that rifle then
as flat and still
as a white cloud's belly;
or the snow in the woods last January.
We ran between leafless trees—
skeletons rising from a frozen white grave;
dry bones standing
waiting for the winds of spring
to breathe into them
and cover them with leaves.
We chased ol' Fred between
those big dead sticks and
he shoved his nose in the snow
and flipped it in my face.
Now ol' Fred, he's running in circles
and you've got that rifle in your hand
tracking him like a treed raccoon.
That last one he treed
still bites him back so hard
he's even scared of water.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Jack Johnson, A Novel (excerpt)

Bill Brooks

The wan light of a new Paris morning falls softly into the room. A black man, sleek with muscle, bare from the waist up, shadow boxes while the woman sleeps on the bed. The boxer's hands flick the air, strike like snakes at an invisible target. He moves and punches. *Snap, snap, snap.* He bobs and weaves, throws uppercuts and crosses and hooks. He throws the punches so all the power flows outward from the shoulder into the massive fists. *Snap, snap, snap.*

He has the grace of a ballerina, the instinct of a bullfighter. He has rather slender legs for a man with such a muscular torso. Although there is now a slight paunch around his middle, he still has the hunger of his youth, the fierce need to punch away anything in front of him. *Snap, snap, snap.* His bare feet whisper along the carpet as he moves. He is sleek and restless as a caged panther.

The woman stirs, he barely notices.

He remembers how it felt to lay into Tommy Burns, Jefferies, Langford … all the others. How it felt to smash them down.

From the window he can see slate roofs, soot-coated windows and a hundred blackened chimneys. In the distance, the Eiffel Tower looms against the glaucous sky. A far cry, he thinks, for a down home Texas nigger. *Snap, snap, snap.*

His skin is damp with the effort. He pauses, lowers his arms, feels the hammer of his heart, strong and steady as a gandy dancer laying track. He finds the unlit cigar on the nightstand next to the bottle of Scotch whiskey, most of it gone. There are two glasses, one smudged with lipstick. He strikes a match and takes a deep draw on the cigar and exhales a blue ring of smoke. Then, clenching the cigar between his teeth, he goes back to snapping jabs, the smoke curling up in his eyes. He circles and feints and slugs the air with his fists.

Pigeons strut along the ledge of the building across the way. Strut and coo like streetwalkers. *Snap, snap, snap.* The cigarette smoke forms a wreath round his head, causes him to look like a dancing angel, like a black wraith coming through the fog. He is the embodiment of Othello in a Paris hotel room. And on the bed lies his Desdemona, the latest in a long line of Desdemonas.

He circles and sticks.

He can feel their bones breaking, Tommy Burns and Jim Jeffries and the others. He can see their skin splitting open as he hits them. The white boys never held up like the coloreds. Their faces would turn red and puffy before splitting open. They'd get that look in their eyes— that fear that told him they were finished even before they went down. You couldn't tell with a colored man. Take Gunboat Smith, them big feet of his. He never hit any man harder than he did ol' Gunboat, and yet he didn't see a mote of fear in his eyes nor a tremble of his mouth.

Snap, snap, snap. Jab, hook, right cross, uppercut. You hit a man hard enough with an uppercut you drive his jaw up into his brain. The key is to bend a little from the waist, stand flat-footed, come up with everything you got just as he's moving in. Set him up with the jab. Pester him with the jab, like flies on a drunk's face. Make him want to work his way in. And when he gets angry and comes to you, then bring it up hard. All the way up from the floor hard!

He can see them sinking to their knees, their eyes rolled back in their crumpling faces, half-dead, or wishing they were. You knew when you hit them right. The feeling goes all the way up your arm into your chest. Feels like a hammer striking an egg.

Something makes the pigeons explode from the ledge. He pauses long enough to see what's got them stirred up: a big orange tomcat pounced all over one, the delicate head hanging limp from its mouth. Wings akimbo.

Then rain sweeps across the roofs and smudges the sky even grayer.

Paris, he thinks. What the fuck I doing in Paris?

Soaring with the Wind

Gabrielle M. Thompson

When I was a young girl growing up in idyllic Southern California in the 1950s, the community where I lived was well established, with houses built by individual builders, each having a character of its own, not the disdained tract homes and planned communities that became so prevalent in the next decade.

Trees were planted—every front yard had one. Ours, a California Redwood, was said not to fare well in our sunny clime, yet it quickly outgrew me and was over twenty feet tall when I left my childhood home at nineteen. Abutting the sidewalks in front of our homes, a three-foot grass median separated the walk from the street. Along its greenery, the city had planted oaks which sent their wide branches overhead to offer beauty and shade. They never lost their leaves in the temperate weather.

One particular tree, however, stood above all others in magnificent splendor at the distant end of our residential street. It was older, statelier, and more mysterious. At its base, a bronze plaque gave proof to its uniqueness. Over one hundred feet above, in the top branches, bald eagles had built nests since the time of the Spanish conquistadors. It was not a well-known site or regularly visited by the populace of the town. The eagles were seldom seen, except on high. Encroaching cities drove them ever-distant in their search for food. The surrounding farmlands disappeared during my youth as bedroom communities sprang up from Los Angeles to San Diego. By the time I moved away, the eagles also had departed. But in those early years, they were my familiars. Our common bond was the wind. The eagle tree was the altar where I worshiped nature on windy nights.

When the wind blew and rattled the windowpane next to my bed, it called to me, and I could not resist. Dressed only in pajamas, even, at times, in baby dolls, I would climb out the window and race barefoot down Oak Street. Under the moon's rays, or in the jet darkness of a new moon where the occasional street lamp cast elliptical spotlights on the street corners and gave way to dancing shadows of the wind's creative sculpture, I ran the six blocks to "my" tree. The wind would buffet my pajamas, my hair would flow like Medusa's snakes, and I would feel as if I were flying. In actuality, I was the proverbial good girl—never wild, disruptive, disrespectful, or disobedient. This was a world away from that reality. When the wind wove its magical spell, it pulled me from my bed. I followed without question. It was never a conscious decision; I just went. It never occurred to me that this was "wrong." I was never frightened. This was amazing because at the same time in my life I had come very close to being kidnapped in broad daylight. Yet I never felt these nighttime escapades put me in peril. They were my freedom—the only times in the city that my spirit was free to soar.

The darkness could not prevent the eagles' enjoyment of the wind, either. They would take flight for the pure joy of riding the escalating currents. Once, in those years of a pubescent girl's visitations, one of the eagles graced me with a close encounter. I say graced because it imparted such a sense of wonder and awe to see it land on a nearby branch, when always before they had been flecks on the wind above me. Even with the ferocious stare of the raptor and the knowledge that its talons and beak could rip me

apart, I knew no fear. It was as if he had watched me in my nocturnal visits and finally decided to acknowledge me—as if he had recognized the wild, kindred spirit in me that suffered the constraints of city life. It was enough, to have this singular view. On other nights the feel of the wind on my skin and in my hair and the sound of the trees as they gave their joyously rustling response to its caress were enough.

In my late twenties I left city life on a seventy-five-foot sailboat. For twenty years I lived on the sea, the wind my magic carpet to see the world. I learned to respect and even to fear the wind, having battled storms of fifty knots with heavy seas and having lived through Hurricane Hugo's one-hundred-and-fifty miles-per-hour destruction of the islands we called home.

As I write, now nestled in my Western North Carolina mountain cabin, I listen to the wind weaving its spell in the forest that surrounds me. It moans as it swirls through our cove—a deep, foreboding sound. The storm outside is the furthest reaches of Hurricane Floyd, which battles the eastern portion of the state in these dark hours before dawn. I no longer have an eagle tree, but I let my mind soar as I step out onto my front porch, waiting for the sunrise and giving thanks for the abundant wildlife that visit our acreage. The young girl that raced down the city street has found her home.

Photo by Mary McClurkin

Salt Takes the Bitterness Out

An excerpt from a book about tracking my father into the wilderness of Alzheimer's

Tommy Hays

As we cross into South Carolina and coast down the mountain toward Greenville, I keep my foot on the brake. The minivan squeals around the curves. Connie, my wife, naps beside me with her seat tilted back. In the rearview, I see Max, our eight-year-old, drawing a dragon with his markers and in the far back, Ruth, our five-year-old, bobs her head and sings along with a Kindermusik tape. I'm glad my family is with me. It makes me part of a concerned constituency and not so much a son on his way to confront his father.

Daddy is losing his memory. He's also incontinent. And what prompted this trip is that he has started falling. Mama, suspecting Alzheimer's, has pleaded with him to see a doctor. Has even gone so far as to make appointments for him, which he backs out of at the last minute. My brother Chris, always diplomatic and good at talking with Daddy, flew down from Charlottesville a few weekends ago to talk him into going. Daddy refused. So I'm not sure how I, the one Daddy talks to the least, can change his mind. After all, he hasn't set foot in a doctor's office in thirty-five years. Why would he want to go now when the diagnosis would be nothing but bad news?

Connie opens her eyes when we stop at a traffic light in Traveler's Rest, a little town just twenty minutes north of Greenville. She sits up in her seat, yawning.

"I can't do it," I say.

She yawns again and stretches. "You can do it."

"I keep thinking about that time he lunged at me."

"He's much more mellow than he used to be," she says. And it's true. Daddy has been much more agreeable the past year, as if he has forgotten his bitterness.

"What if he tells me to get out of the house again?"

"It's important you stay calm no matter what he says."

Ruth is singing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" at the top of her lungs. Max clamps his hands over his ears and rolls his eyes. Ruth holds up her fingers. "And it's one! Two! Three strikes you're out of the oooold baaaall gaaaame!!!"

I have been dreading this talk with Daddy ever since I decided to go through with it. I have been dreading it for years. But I decided to try because of Mama, who has retired recently, and after nearly fifty years of going to work every day, deserves to do things she enjoys—work in the yard, go to the symphony, travel. Instead, every moment is swallowed by some new need from Daddy. It's as if he has paced his deterioration by how available she is.

What I don't know is how Daddy will react to my bringing up his seeing a doctor. I'm afraid we'll have a replay of that awful exchange he and I had at Thanksgiving dinner six years ago:

My brother had come down for the holiday, and we were all at the supper table, except for Max, who was two years old at the time and circling the table, chattering about something, when my father had said gruffly, "Oh, shut up, Max!"

I stiffened. When we were children, our parents, especially Daddy, had drilled into us that "shut up," along with "stupid," were the worst things you could say to anybody. "Don't talk like that to Max," I said.

Daddy set down his fork and turned to me. "Never," he said in a low, angry voice, "never talk to me like that!"

"I will if you talk to Max like that!" We sounded like children ourselves.

"Out!" he said, rising to his feet and pointing to the front door. "Get out of my house!" He came at me, sort of, but even six years ago he was unsteady on his feet, and seemed to topple toward me. Chris pulled him back down in his seat.

"Get out!" Daddy repeated.

"Fine!" I said, throwing down my napkin. "Fine!"

"Don't, Tom," Mama said to Daddy. "Don't," she said to me. There was an awful pause, when everyone was quiet. Max, not having the least idea what the grownups were screaming about, decided to move to the living room couch.

"I was just kidding the boy," Daddy glanced regretfully in Max's direction. Then, without another word, he went upstairs.

"It didn't sound like kidding to me," I said after he had closed the door behind him.

"To me either," said Chris.

"Go talk to Tom," my mother said to me, getting up to clear the dishes.

"Tom didn't mean anything," Connie said to me. "He just reacted."

"Why should I apologize? He's the one who told Max to shut up." I pushed my plate back and looked at my brother, who shrugged. Then I gave a dramatic sigh, threw my napkin on the table and stood. I opened the door to upstairs, paused on the first step, then walked slowly up. I found Daddy sitting in a chair, smoking.

Before I could say anything, he said, "I shouldn't have spoken to you that way."

"I'm sorry," I said, trying not to cough in the smoke-clouded room. Daddy, who had smoked three packs a day for fifty years, used to smoke at the dinner table at the end of every meal, but over the years we had driven him upstairs with our complaints, which had gotten stronger after the children were born.

"You know," he said, "I can read minds." He gave me a hard look. "I don't try to read them," he said. "I can't help it."

"What do you mean?"

My father shook his head gravely, as if what he had read in my mind was unspeakable. I guessed the worst, that he believed I wished him dead.

Over the years I had kept my distance. He made me uncomfortable. This had not always been true. When I was a little boy and even into my high school years, we had been close. But as I moved into my mid-twenties, our conversations became strained. Daddy became preachy as he tried to pass on his mystical beliefs, which had grown out of decades of reading Thomas Merton, Huston Smith, Einstein, Bagwan Sheree Rajneesh, Joel Goldsmith, Meister Eckhart, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, Adam Smith, William James.... The list went on and on, and so did his lectures. He would give me books, and I would try to read them. But the language was so abstract, so philosophical, so high-flown that I would find myself yearning for the mundane, the sensual, the ballast of the embodied moment. I turned to fiction.

While Daddy moved up into religion, I moved down through story. I set aside the

books he gave me and picked up Eudora Welty, James Agee, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Malamud, Steinbeck, Saroyan and many others. Not that Daddy hadn't read most, if not all of these. When he was younger, Daddy read nearly a novel a night. But in the end, he believed fiction was beside the point, even a distraction from the point.

While perhaps I should have been touched that he wanted to pass onto me what mattered so much to him, I did not have that kind of distance or insight. And as the years passed, it became harder for me to talk to him. Whenever I was around him I felt I wasn't profound enough. Everything was too little to talk about. So perhaps he could read my mind. I was always relieved whenever he opened the door and went upstairs, leaving the rest of the family to talk about the weather or new neighbors up the street or funny things the children had said. Although I never consciously wished Daddy dead, perhaps I did want him out of the room forever.

"Does Max get on your nerves?" I asked, as he tapped his ashes into an ashtray.

"Max is fine," he said.

I stood there another minute. I wanted more. I wanted him to say Max was exceptional, the apple of his eye. I wanted him to tell me a story about him, something Max had said or done that had impressed him or made him laugh. I wanted specifics. I wanted my father to offer up a beautiful detail about my son.

Daddy looked at me and said, "I love you." He hadn't said this to me since I was a little boy. He stood and hugged me, and I was reminded he was not some ethereal consciousness. I could smell the smoke in his shirt and feel the bones of his back.

He sat down, and I lingered with him up there, not knowing what I felt anymore. And then I went downstairs, leaving Daddy to finish his cigarette.

I returned to the women below, who were in the kitchen putting away the food, and my brother, who was washing dishes.

"I've never seen him like that," Chris said, setting a plate in the dish drain.

"Tom has a temper," Mama said to Connie, then looked at me. "You are a lot alike."

In a little while Mama called Daddy down for dessert. And we resumed our places at the table, including Max in his booster seat next to my father.

"Good, huh?" said Daddy to Max, who, having finished, had smeared a good portion of pumpkin pie on his cheeks. Max started to get down. "Hold on, there." Daddy reached over with his napkin and tenderly wiped my son's mouth. Our family was restored, sort of.

In more direct, more openly emotional families, this scene with my father might have been a relatively small thing. But in our quiet family, all of us with PhDs in avoidance, it was nothing less than upheaval. Daddy and I never argued like that again, because neither of us wanted to. I tried to relax and allow Daddy to be himself around Max, even if that included reprimanding him. For his part, Daddy never said "Shut up" to either of our children again.

When we arrive in Greenville, Mama has lunch waiting. Daddy eats slowly and says very little. The conversation flows around him, like around a stone in the middle of a river. I try not to watch him, feeling voyeuristic, but my eyes are drawn to his shaggy gray hair and his unshaven face, so uncharacteristic of the immaculate father I grew up

with. Mama can't get him to shave regularly and he hasn't showered in months. She sponges him off as much as he will allow. She says his toenails, which he won't let her cut, are grotesquely long. The image is too intimate for me. I don't like knowing about my father's toenails.

After lunch he goes upstairs to smoke, and Connie takes the children up the street to the neighbor's to play. Mama, who has finished washing dishes, says to me, "I'm going with them." She hangs up her apron and heads out the door. Everybody wants to be out of the house when Daddy and I have this talk.

When I walk upstairs, the heat is stifling. Mama had new air conditioning put in, but Daddy shuts off all the vents. He wears padded sweat pants and a flannel shirt and still complains of not being able to get warm.

The only light comes from a lamp in his bedroom, which is just around the corner. There is an entire wall of bookshelves, which Daddy had a contractor, one of his Waffle House friends, build when they moved in. But the shelves are too long so they sag. Daddy wedges his books tightly into the shelves to keep out mildew. I run my finger over them. No dust.

Across from the bookshelves on the other side of the room is his work area. Daddy has fashioned an L-shaped desk out of a long mirrored table that he'd built for our first house's foyer and then against that he has set up two old card tables, giving him plenty of work surface. There are hundreds of pencils, pens, erasers and Exacto knives.

Spread out on the tables are cropped photos of pretty women, local girls trying to look like models. Many of them are in swimsuits. I'm not sure if Daddy took these pictures. He uses various kinds of spray or ink to make silhouettes of the women, giving them an ethereal, shadowy quality. This is his art and he has explained it all to Chris at some point.

"Daddy?"

I hear him shuffling behind the bathroom door. Maybe he has just brushed his teeth. He comes out. "Yeah, honey?"

"Can we talk?" I ask.

"Sure."

"Upstairs or downstairs?"

"Doesn't matter."

I'm tempted to suggest downstairs but decide he'll be most comfortable on his own turf. "How about in your room?" I go back to his room, remove his clothes from a straight-backed chair beside his bed. Then I turn another cushioned chair at his makeshift desk so that it faces the other.

Daddy sits in the chair at his desk, which is really an old Formica kitchen table with a metal vertical file—little cubby holes, which hold index cards he has scribbled notes on, cigarette lighters, letters and bank statements (where later I will find a couple of thousand dollars in cashed social security checks). Across from his bed, he has made a kind of cardboard bureau by taping small boxes together. Everything upstairs feels improvised.

"I wanted to talk to you about how you're doing, about your health." I take a deep breath. "You're important to us, to Max and Ruth, and to Connie and to me, of course." I sound stiff and overly deliberate.

"That's nice to hear," he says but frowns as if he doesn't understand what I'm driving at.

"You don't seem to be doing very well," I say, shifting uncomfortably in my chair. "You know how you've mentioned to me several times about your memory not being what it used to be?"

"No." He shakes his head and smiles, indulgently.

"Several times over the past year, when we've visited, you've said you have trouble remembering things."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

I sigh. He doesn't remember enough to remember he is forgetting.

"Also your bladder," I say. "Mama says you're having trouble making it to the bathroom."

He looks up at the ceiling as if trying to listen to what I'm saying. It isn't until a little later in the conversation that I notice the giant stack of Depends adult diapers underneath his desk. Several times I'm tempted to point them out, but that feels cruel.

"You aren't walking very well," I say. "You have trouble moving. You have trouble sitting and standing."

I name a few other problems, but the whole time he smiles and shakes his head like I'm speaking a foreign language. Finally he says, "I find this all very puzzling."

As we sit there it becomes clear that Daddy isn't going to get angry, which gives me a little more courage. "Mama said you haven't been interested in seeing the doctor."

"Your mother doesn't understand that there are many different realities." He picks a piece of lint from his pants.

I try another tack with Daddy. "I'm worried about Mama because she's finding it harder to take care of you."

"She doesn't need to."

I'm not sure if he means she doesn't need to find it hard or if she doesn't need to take care of him.

"But, Daddy, what if she weren't here?" I hear my voice get louder and I sit up in my chair. "What if she weren't here to feed you, to help you shave...." My eyes wander to the Depends at his feet.

"I don't mean to imply that she's not helpful," he says.

I almost laugh. I want to say, Helpful, hell! She is all that stands between you and a nursing home! But I remember Connie's warning to stay calm, and I hold my tongue.

"Your mother is an extraordinary woman," he says. He says this several times and clearly means it. "It used to upset me that she didn't understand me, but it doesn't anymore. I'm used to people not understanding me. I've felt that way ever since I was a child." I had never heard him say this.

"If you won't go to the doctor for you, will you go to the doctor for Mama's sake?"

"I'm perfectly fine."

I find myself studying the old lamp on his desk. I remember it from our living room on Victory Avenue. It's dated looking, seventies-ish and gives off a dingy light.

"If you're firm in your beliefs," I say, "then it shouldn't matter one way or the other if you go to a doctor." Under my shirt, little beads of sweat roll down my sides.

"If you're really committed," my father begins, "then you can't accept a reality you

don't believe in." He pauses. He pauses a lot. "It wouldn't be a problem if your mother didn't make it a problem."

"Whenever Mama talks about your beliefs it's always with respect, and she has tried to honor them over the years. But now she's at a loss."

"Oh."

Occasionally I am aware of how incredibly hot it is. My head begins to throb. It seems even hotter in his bedroom, close to a hundred degrees, a purging heat.

"Why don't you go out anymore?" I ask.

Daddy cocks his head as if he doesn't understand.

"You are naturally such a gregarious person," I say. "You like being with people. But you're becoming more and more..." I bring my hands slowly together, and he watches. "...confined," I say.

"Confined," he echoes. "It's only natural." At first I think he means it's only natural that as one gets older, one has less energy for getting out.

"It's natural to want to love and be loved," he says. He is referring to my comment about his liking people. He hasn't heard what I said about his world narrowing. And here I should have brought up his sleeping sixteen hours a day every day, but, in the end, it wouldn't have mattered what I said.

"You do seem more sort of just up here," I say, indicating his room. "More cut off from the rest of us."

"If that were true," he says, frowning as if thinking very hard, "I believe I would feel lonely, and I don't."

"Good." I drop my hands into my lap. "Good." It strikes me as more than a little ironic to be pointing out to him his various ailments, especially if he doesn't see them as such.

"Mama feels frustrated," I say toward the end of our conversation. "She needs help. And I think it would be a demonstration of your love for her to see a doctor."

"It wouldn't be a problem if she didn't make it problem," he says. He pauses. "She is an extraordinary woman."

"You could just go and meet this guy."

"What guy?"

"This doctor she's found."

"Oh."

I take out my handkerchief and wipe sweat off my forehead. Downstairs I hear the front door open and the children run inside. I look at my watch. We have been up here nearly an hour. It's time to head back up the mountain. We have a party we're supposed to go to. But I sit there a little longer, because I'm not sure I'll sit up here with him ever again.

"I don't know what to tell you, Thomas," Daddy says. Throughout the conversation he has called me "Thomas" instead of "Tom." "Thomas" always felt more affectionate. "This hasn't been very satisfactory, has it?" he says, which is the closest he comes to admitting there might be a problem.

He slides a cigarette out of the pack on his desk, then goes out to the main room, looking for a lighter, and I follow him. This is probably the longest I have ever been with Daddy that he hasn't smoked.

"I don't want you to worry about me," he says. "I don't want anybody to feel isolated." I'm not quite sure what he means, but I know he's making his best effort to respond.

"Why don't we go downstairs and see what the kids are up to?" I ask.

"Okay," he says and slowly we descend the stairs together.

"My head is killing me," I groan as I drive through busy downtown Greenville, which has been a little too chicly revived with galleries, street cafes and coffee shops. "You think he'll go to the doctor now?" Connie asks, digging an Ibuprofen bottle out of her purse.

"He says there's nothing wrong. And who am I to say there is?" I rub my eyes, trying to massage the pain away.

Connie hands me a couple of Ibuprofen and the water bottle she brought on the trip. "But it's not fair to Mama," I say, swallowing the pills.

We stop at a gas station on Poinsett Highway, a desolate, treeless section north of downtown. There is nothing chic about this stark section of town. And I barely have enough energy to pump gas. Sleepy-eyed, Ruth smiles at me weakly through the back window and presses her hand against the glass. I press mine over hers and wonder just how far off the day is when she and Max will have to worry what to do about me.

Connie drives us back up the mountain, the children fall asleep, and I lean back, shut my eyes and try to rest. But I keep seeing Daddy sitting there with his amused smile, as if his failing health is a matter of my failing perception.

I open my eyes. "I don't know if I'm up for this party." The party is for a friend of ours, a pastoral counselor, who has just received his doctorate in divinity.

"When y'all came back downstairs," Connie says, as we gain the top of the incline and cross back into North Carolina, "and we were all just sitting around in the living room, there was a different feeling between you and your father."

"Really?"

"Like something had been settled."

By the time we are in Asheville and at the graduation party, my headache has let up. The party is a potluck at my friend's boss's home, an airy wood-frame house set deep in the trees. We sit outside in the shade of immense sycamores, drink iced tea and eat from paper plates laden with pesto, tabouleh and fruit salad. The people—mostly ministers, pastoral counselors and their families—couldn't be friendlier, yet I feel out of place, as I do at parties. And I'm still tired from being with Daddy, tired down in my bones, as if I've given blood. The conversation around me, while warm and hospitable, is full of Biblical references and counseling humor.

Then a creamy-complexioned, dark-eyed woman, an Episcopal priest in training, who has been sitting across from me with her husband and their three-month-old baby, sets her plate down and matter-of-factly begins to nurse her baby. I look away, but when I see she doesn't care, I watch her downturned face and how she pours herself into the baby.

The serenity of that image and the pleasant banter of these good-natured people so schooled in their beliefs suddenly have me longing for my fierce father sealed upstairs in his heat, wrestling with reality—a stack of Depends lying in wait.

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Sisters of the Rainbow Waters

Gabrielle M. Thompson

The sugar mill ruins lie in shadows around us, testimony to the slave revolt that wrought its destruction. Old coppers of various depths that once bubbled with refining molasses now hold water from recent rains and reflect the silver sliver of the moon on their surface. We build a fire on the beach and begin smudging one another with sweet grass and sage. The combined herbs smolder in an abalone shell, an import from my birth state of California. It was there my husband and I built the ship that brought us to these islands. To direct the smoke, I gently wave an eagle feather over the yawning mouth of the shell. The quill is decoratively wrapped in leather with fringed trails sporting Virgin Island shells. It was a gift from my friend, now my sister, Muffy, who is the impetus behind this group we call Sisters of the Rainbow Waters. Each new moon we gather to praise the Goddess and honor our femininity.

After the cleansing process of smudging, we turn our prayers to the seven directions—and the colors, plants, minerals, and virtues they represent. The east, area of new beginnings, is first. The eagle soars in the east, connecting us with the heavens and our higher selves. The color is yellow, like the sun which rises in that direction. A woman sits in the place of each direction, and her accolade gives her own piquancy to the blessing. I sit in the south, the color red, the place of blood, and of women. It is also the place of green growing plants, the mouse, and the coyote. An avid gardener, I have a special affinity with this place and relate my spiritual growth to the abundance of the earth. The mouse is gentle, yet hard working, and nurturing of its young. The coyote, the trickster, teaches us to laugh along our path. It is he that gives me the most pause for thought. Laughter is what I want more of in my life. When we finish with the last direction, we sing:

We all come from the Mother
and to her we shall return...
like a drop,
of rain,
flowing to the river.

The moon represents the dark side, hidden intuition, mystery, age-old wisdom, and is the feminine aspect of the occult. The new moon was the time when aboriginal women menstruated. They did not have artificial light to affect their normal cycle. Many indigenous groups had special moon lodges where menstruating women congregated during their moon time. The "grandmothers" and adolescent females cooked and cared for the tribe at these times. Having lived on a boat and spent years in close proximity with another woman who sailed with us and having lived with no electricity in those early years, I had experienced first-hand the way women's bodies adjusted to the same monthly schedule. Even now, in spite of all the influences of modern society, over half of us still menstruate with the moon's waning.

On sheets of paper, by the light of the fire, we write what we no longer wish to have in our lives—our shortcomings, our upsets, our problems, our anger. Some lists are short, some not. As a woman chooses, she can state these aloud, or not. The process takes

time as most women wish to share their burdens in the hope of clarity through group wisdom. The lists are then thrown into the fire, in symbolic ending. After a prayer, the feather is passed around the circle. Each person closes her eyes, meditates, and then says whatever word pops into her mind. One of us records these words. After the last participant, the recorder reads the verbal gifts in different cadence and groupings until the "message" becomes clear. It is different each month but never fails to amaze us in its importance to each of us. We close the circle by stating what we wish to grow in our lives as the moon moves into its fertile fullness.

The beach around us is deserted. We shed our clothes and walk into the sea, hand in hand. In the crystal clear waters, now dark with shadow, we float on our backs, watching the moon's Cheshire smile above. We *are* nymphs, no matter what the weight or size of our bodies; we are all beautiful. I know I will be leaving soon, moving back to the "big island up north." I wonder if my life stateside will be as full, if I will find women friends who complement me in my need for ritual to express my gratitude to the Great Spirit. It is in this time, my moon time, that I am most happy to be a woman. I wonder if men realize what they miss—this depth of love, bonding, and recognition with the Goddess, Mother Earth, and the feminine self. As women, we are so lucky. We can love men and have husbands and families, yet still love our sisters with joy in their being. It is a deep knowing, a bonding that is heartfelt. Perhaps it is because we see life through emotion, through our hearts.

I share my thoughts with Muffy. She is a wise woman, the only one of us trained by a Native American Wise Woman. She is certain I will find what I need in my venture north. She reminds me at this very moment women all over the world are joined together honoring who they are and the Mother who nurtures us all. Even if I do not find connection in my community, I can take this night of the new moon to meditate and do ritual and, in doing so, will be one with those on my spirit plane. Her words give me strength. I know I will not be able to replace the companionship I have found here, but I will evolve other relationships that will succor my spirit.

Killing
Every
Memory
(of you)

Thomas Gore

With a yellow glow and a growing warmth,
Your face bubbles, bursts, blackens,
And releases the swarm of memories
That sting my face with the truth
Of your lies—

. . .

I can almost hear you calling my name.
To remember the sound of your voice
Only makes me want to hit
(—your face, yes, I see it, I'll admit—)
the wall.
I remember all you said to me
(. . . I promise . . .)
(. . . you won't regret this . . .)
And see how much I was willing to believe
Because of you.
After too many second chances, you threw the last away.

. . .

—Your face,
Your smile,
Your frozen gaze
Curl and turn to ash in my hand.

For now, I'll just believe you're gone.

Photo by Mary McClurkin

Thai Lessons

Lee Sokol

In the mid-1980s, I served as a Peace Corps volunteer in northern Thailand, teaching English at Chiengrai Teacher Training College. I grew up in a family of Kennedy worshipers, so I had known since seventh grade that I would one day join the Peace Corps. In addition to idealistically wanting to make the world a better place, with my BA in Anthropology, I wanted to learn about another country's customs. I never dreamed I would get a first-hand lesson in Thai funeral customs.

I had my lesson in these customs when one of my best Thai friends died. Kesap taught chemistry in the science department of the college. All eight teachers in the department took turns cooking lunch for each other every day in one of the science labs. They asked me to start eating with them so they would have a native speaker to practice English with. After only a few weeks of this business-like arrangement, I grew to be very fond of these teachers and to have great respect for them, especially for their sense of humor and play. Kesap was a year older than I and single, so the other science teachers enjoyed joking about our getting married so Kesap could get his green card and I could "learn by doing" about Thai marriage customs.

One Thursday morning we received the horrible news that Kesap had wrecked his motorcycle the evening before. He was driving back from town and hit a bicycle that had no lights. Strangely, the bicyclist was not hurt, but Kesap was critically injured. He lay in a coma for a day and died that night. When we received the news from the hospital, I kept asking why he hadn't been wearing a helmet—it might have saved him. My Thai friends responded that if it was his time, a helmet could not save him. They didn't fight it like I did. As Buddhists, they knew it was his karma, and they were prepared to accept it. They immediately turned their energies to funeral preparations and telling stories about Kesap. I had read that Thais do not want funerals to be sad and it seemed that they were setting out to prove the truth of that. Kesap was known as a "joker man" and that is how they wanted to remember him. One of the science teachers asked if I would make cookies for them the next week and I said yes. He said he would be happy to eat Kesap's share.

We spent the next three days at the temple with Kesap. (Because his death had been violent and unexpected, the laying out could not be at his house—it would be too dangerous to have his unhappy ghost in his home.) When I arrived, Kesap was laid out on a bed, with his right hand hanging over the side, suspended over a large silver bowl. I was given a small silver bowl of water and directed to join the line of family and friends walking on their knees to Kesap's bedside. One by one, we told him goodbye while pouring water from our individual bowls over his hand and into the large bowl on the floor. Then we walked away on our knees.

After this ceremony, Kesap was put in a casket, which remained in the temple and was very much a center of activity for the next few days. Whenever we ate, someone put a small dish of the food on the end of the casket, knocked on the casket and said, "Kesap, come eat. We have rice and curry. And a little glass of Mekong whiskey, too!" The first night, no one remembered to give him food and the next day one of the

:eachers said that Kesap got angry and stomped his foot at the end of the casket. In ıddition to keeping a constant supply of food on the casket, his friends also put his ɔeloved cowboy hat and the manual to his Apple computer on top of the casket.

People busied themselves at the temple for the three days by cooking meals for the :rowd or by helping to decorate the flatbed truck that would carry the casket from the :emple to the crematorium. Banana stalks and watermelon rinds were intricately carved nto leaves and flowers—these would be attached to the sides of the truck. Several :eachers embroidered Kesap's name and dates of birth and death on funeral fans for the ıine monks always in attendance. (Nine is special in Buddhism since it is three times hree. Three is a holy number because Buddha was born, received enlightenment and lied all on the same day of the year. Three also represents Buddha, his teachings and his lisciples.) On Friday, Saturday and Sunday evening, these monks sat in the front of the :emple and spoke of their memories of Kesap. My Thai was not good enough to follow nuch of what they said, but the Thais kept breaking out in laughter. A group of Thais aughing is a glorious sound—the entire group laughs up and down the scale in unison.

Through all these activities, I never saw anyone crying, though I couldn't stop myself rom frequently tearing up, sniffling and even sobbing. Finally, one of my friends turned o me and said, "You cry really well." That gave me visions of being a paid mourner at a uneral march during the Black Plague.

On the final morning, there was a special service with 31 monks because Kesap was 1 years old. After the service, we gave food to the monks for lunch. After they finished :ating, some people ate lunch at the temple and others went out to restaurants because here was not enough food for so many people. I was leaving for a restaurant, but my riend Penpun stopped me and said that Kesap wanted the science teachers and me to all at the lunch he'd made. He and another teacher always cooked lunch on Mondays and ince this was Monday, he had cooked lunch for us.

After lunch, Kesap was moved from the temple to the crematorium. Just before the asket was put in the oven, it was opened so everyone could say goodbye once more. Before going up to the casket, we were each given a slip of paper with a Buddhist blessing n it. As we walked by, we tossed the blessings into the casket so they would burn with Kesap. After everyone had said goodbye, the casket was closed and moved into the ven. When the iron grate on the oven was locked shut, Kesap's family finally broke own. He had a younger brother who was a student at the college and lived with him. or four days, he had been in control of himself and taken charge of everything necessary or the funeral. When that oven door closed, he sobbed and grabbed onto the grate and ould not leave. One of the teachers finally had to drag him away.

We all missed Kesap very much, but it was not long before the Thai sense of humor ame back into play. Shortly before his death, Kesap had given me an old black and hite television. The science teachers jokingly asked if I was not afraid that Kesap's host would appear to me on the TV screen. They said if he did, I should ask him for the inning lottery number.

Truth

Nancy Dillingham

Without the sun
the yellow leaves
lighten the morning

Golden in the hills
they burn
turning the world mellow

their message muted
beauty dazzling truth
ruthless before nightfall

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Untying Cora

Jan Cavanaugh Graham

Once when I was about 8 years old, I was sitting lazily on the front porch of the pink ottage in one of the old, freshly-painted rocking chairs. I loved Pamlico at night ecause the wind seemed to pick up in the evenings and the pines swayed in the moon-ight over the water. Occasionally, a boat would go silently by in the dark, lit up with oft yellow lights. As one was going by, I felt a mixture of fear, excitement, and dread. Being young and not familiar with that feeling as I am now (now I call it premonition nd inherited it from my mother), I decided that something terrible was going to hap-en. In my youthful mind, I decided that something "terrible" to me would be that I ould die in my sleep that night. So, I didn't want to go to bed. But Mama and Dear, ny grandmother, insisted that I get into the top bunk bed and try to go to sleep. I lay here a long time listening and feeling and, then, I did finally drift off to sleep.

It seemed that in an instant, I woke up. Something had awakened me; I didn't now what. As I lay there, I realized, without actually knowing, that the boat had fallen here Daddy had jacked it up over the water today. The water was rough. I could hear creaking. I thought the boat would sink!

I still remember the cold floor of the painted cement porch as I ran through to my Iama and Daddy's room. I hesitated then because I could hear the snores of my daddy nd was afraid to wake him. What if it was nothing wrong at all? I shook him awake nd told him that the boat had fallen. He answered, as I had expected, that I was just reaming. I insisted that he go look; so, to humor me, he pulled on his old fishing pants nd went barefooted out to the pier in the semi-darkness. I stood shivering at the screen oor.

He came quickly back to the cottage, going to wake my grandfather. The boat had llen. The rope had broken. The boat would sink if something wasn't done immedi-ely. My grandfather, in his striped pajamas, came out of his room, peering around ithout his glasses. When he rummaged through the back porch to find a rope, he uldn't find one. There was no other course of action but to go to Mr. Brock's for a pe.

Mr. and Mrs. Brock lived in the little white cottage with black shutters that jutted ut towards the water's edge like a little houseboat. Mr. Brock answered the insistent anging on his door with watery eyes squinting behind his thick glasses. His skinny body as visible through his thin white bed shirt that fell way past his knees. He had a little hite bed cap on his head. Even at that urgent time, I was keenly aware of the distinct nell of his house—a mixture of the last night's supper, some kind of rubbing liniment, ewing tobacco, fresh paint, and, well, just their own old family smell.

My dad told Mr. Brock we needed a rope. The yellow nylon one with the burned nds that kept it from fraying had broken under the strain of the boat and it was in nger of sinking. Mr. Brock rushed off to untie Cora.

Now Cora weighed about 225 pounds. Where Mr. Brock was lean, Mrs. Brock was t. She had massive arms and legs and wore low-heeled black pumps that could be eard on the linoleum floors of their humble place as she prepared the usual supper of

banana and peanut butter sandwiches. We loved to hear those pumps head to the porch and over the blast of her "stories" in the afternoons she would call my sister and me in for a whole pack of Dentyne chewing gum each As sweet as we knew her to be, the truth was that Cora was suffering from senility and believed that poor, little Mr. Brock had another woman living in their attic. Mrs. Brock would get up in the night to try to catch this woman in her kitchen or in her bedroom stealing her underclothes. Mr. Brock had soon realized that when Mrs. Brock got up, she usually fell, and he would have to struggle to lift her massive bulk back on the bed. So, as any sane, loving and kind-hearted husband would do, Mr. Brock tied Cora to her bed at night. And we needed her rope!

Quick work was made of untying Cora, and Mr. Brock hurried back with a thick white rope with fraying ends that was used to save the boat until morning could come and the boat ramp could be repaired.

I was a hero! I had saved the boat from sinking! I can still remember my granddaddy telling Charlie Suggs, Guy, even Mr. Foster (and all of the gang) the now famous story. And I learned that premonitions were not something to fear but a gift from my mother and God. I learned to welcome them as a unique sixth sense.

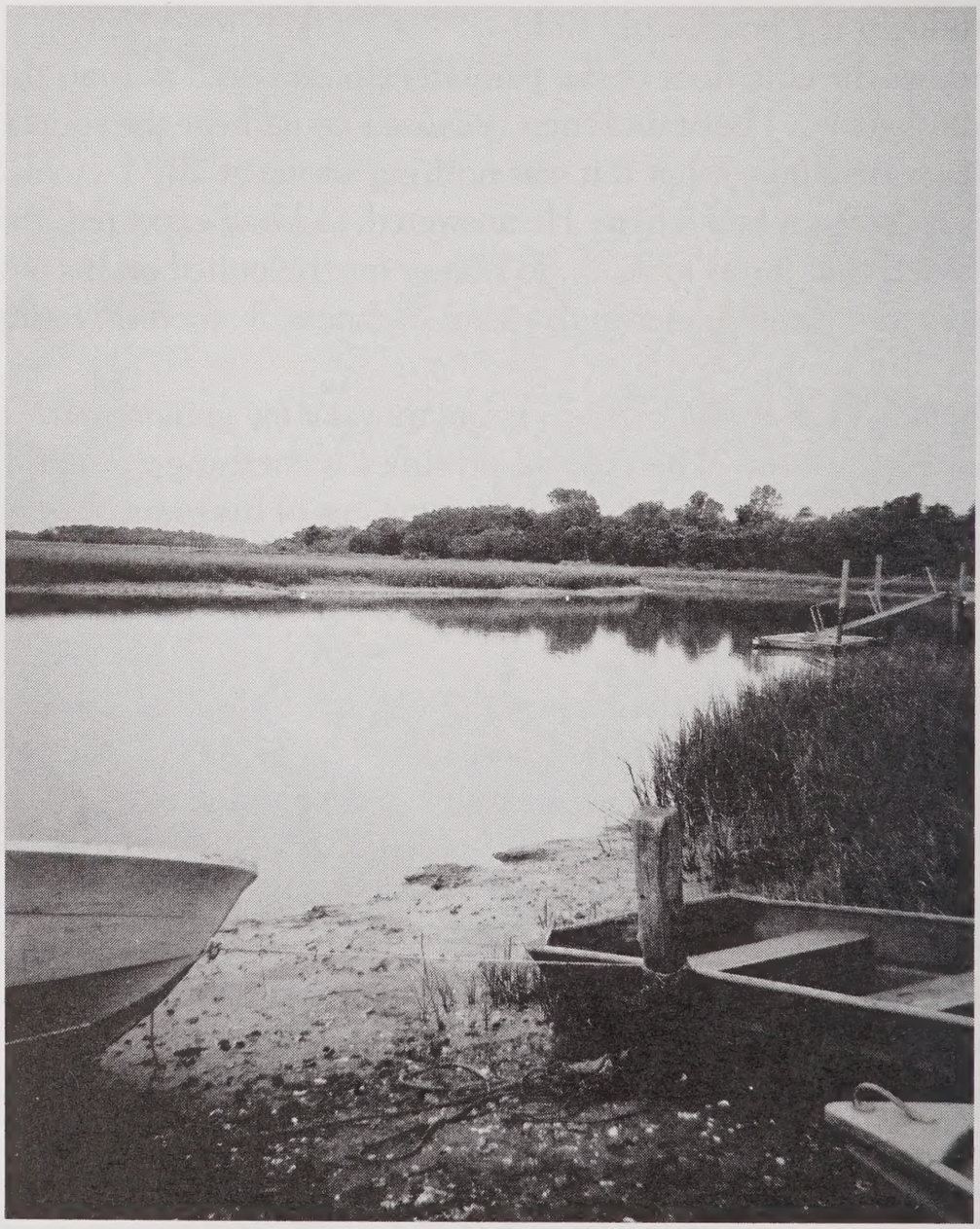


Photo by Mary McClurkin

Whips and Chains

Nancy Dillingham

I

Summertimes, my daddy's Uncle John sat in a black coat and hat on the high front porch of his house beside the creek, legs crossed, scrutinizing the world with distant eyes as it moved up and down the road before him, and, on occasion, when I passed him coming down the lane that joined our bottom land and said "hey" to him in a breathless little syllable because Mother said be polite, his voice, dry, low, when he spoke to me, whistled by my ear like an alien, cold wind.

II

Before, when Uncle John's wife died, Daddy swore that on the night he sat up with Aunt Dock's body before the funeral the next day the devil dragged chains up and down the stairs at midnight and that everyone else who was there that night heard the noise also, an awful sound. He was so spooked he never went into Uncle John's house again, and, thereafter, when Mother mentioned Aunt Dock's name, Daddy always got that look in his eye like a trapped animal and bolted from the room.

III

To hear Daddy tell it (and the others who were there), the door to the room where Aunt Dock lay in her casket somehow jammed just as the chains were being dragged up and down the stairs. According to the story, a powerful force of wind came from nowhere into the quiet of the room and the stillness of the night and blew the door shut. Inexplicably it stuck as if by suction—maybe it had swelled from the rain the day before—the house was near the creek—and everyone was a prisoner suffocating in the small room for what seemed an eternity of time before they managed to force it open again. Daddy said they made a long, human chain of their own and tugged as one in a frightful act of desperation until they pulled it open and breathed again. Daddy beat a hasty retreat into the night.

IV

Whenever Daddy or anyone else told that tale, I imagined a different scenario completely. It was Aunt Dock herself dragging the chains up and down in a final act of revenge. I had heard the tales about Aunt Dock who had long red hair, painted her face and wore dangling earrings. Daddy laughed somewhat nervously I thought and cast a sidelong glance at my mother when he said that Aunt Dock liked "to throw one back," meaning she liked to take a drink of whisky like the men, and said that Uncle John had tried to tame her, to "break" her like a horse and that she was a "handful." Daddy added, always in a mock-serious tone with another wary glance at my mother, "You have to break a horse, don't you?"

Mother always took it up at that point and told a more lurid tale—that once Uncle John had cornered Aunt Dock in the barn loft and had almost beaten her to death. He used the horse whip. Every time they told the tale I trembled as I imagined him flailing away as she tried to dodge him, and Daddy invariably looked sheepish and uncomfortable.

V

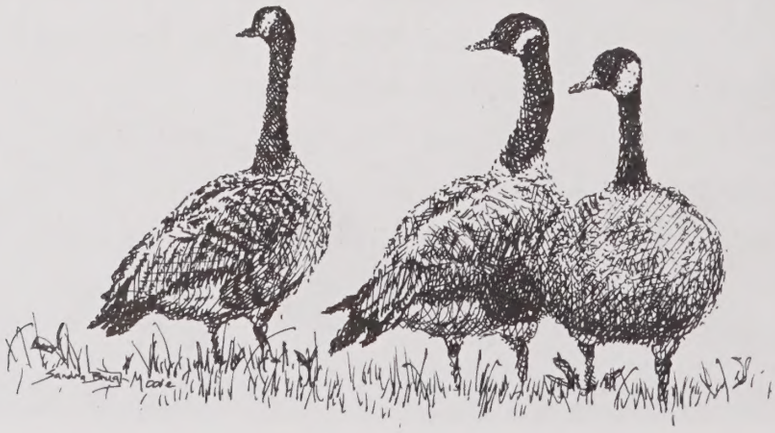
He had to break her like a horse so that she would be fit to ride. I imagined him flailing away with the horse whip as she tried to dodge him, to fend off the blows, to protect her face. I saw the wild, frightened look in her eyes and imagined the cold that shook her to the bone, the hay frosty and stiff as icicles—no warmth anywhere in the cold isolation of the barn loft, certainly not in Uncle John's menacing, lusterless eyes, cold with fury. I felt the sting on my cheek as the horse whip connected. I felt the searing pain. I tasted the blood and smelled the mustiness of the hay as Aunt Dock fell, face-first, bleeding into it. I gasped for breath with her as she felt his body on hers, suffocatingly heavy, felt the whip, a makeshift bit between her teeth, silencing her screams, felt her submission to the final indignation as he branded her forever his and she drowned in his workmanship of it.

VI

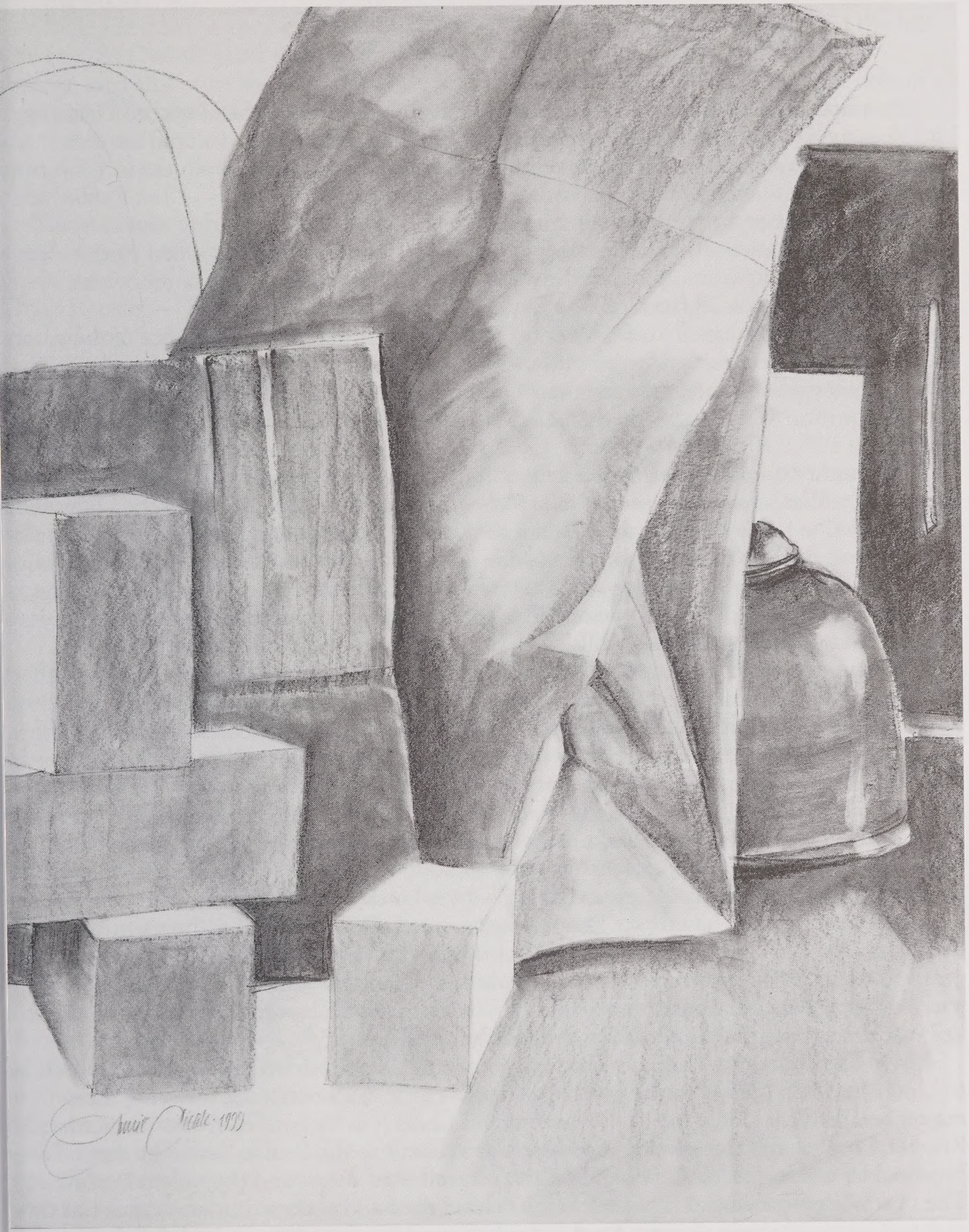
Whenever smoke curled out of Uncle John's chimney in an "S" shape—for Satan?—I wondered aloud if the devil were coming after Uncle John for his evil deeds. Child, you do have such an imagination, my mother said. But then something happened that made them all think twice about my suppositions. One day when Uncle John was attempting to shoe his horse, a normally docile old mare, she kicked him in the head, killing him instantly. Daddy said he had a brain hemorrhage. The night before the funeral I peeked over the rim of the casket and looked at Uncle John. I pressed one finger into the hoof mark on his head. It was hot to the touch.

VII

After that, the horse was generally unmanageable. It roamed the pasture among the chokeberry and thorn bushes. Daddy fed it. One morning I went to the pasture alone, and through the fence I gingerly touched the mare's flank and ran my hand down to her hoof. She lifted it and placed it in my hand. It was hot to the touch. I looked into her eyes and gently stroked her head. The early morning sun caught on her mane and it glowed red.



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore



Drawing by Annie Cicale

A Fox Hunt with Uncle Joe

Richard B. Hurley

On a hot summer afternoon in July 1954, I'd seen Uncle Joe at the Haywood Café after Little League practice. In keeping with his established tradition when I would see him downtown, he bought me a double-decker chocolate ice cream cone for ten cents. I was truly excited when he offered to take my brother and me fox huntin'. Jim Ab— "Jim Rabbit" as Uncle Joe called him— and I got our knapsacks together. They were Army surplus from World War II, coupled with woolen sleeping bags—same vintage—and ground cloths. We bought them for fifty cents apiece at the Army Store on Main Street in Canton where we lived. Uncle Joe took all the food, the water, and the foxhounds.

Neither a firearm nor a jug was ever taken on his foxhunt since the essence of the sport was listening to the music of the hounds and bragging about whose dog was in the lead. The elusive fox was always the faster and more cunning, and could bring the chase to an end at will by returning to its den for the night. Naturally, on a foxhunt lively conversation was plentiful!

Our mother dropped us off at Uncle Joe's, where his green '48 Jeep was parked, loaded with a few gallon jugs of water and Uncle Joe's weathered hunting gear. I watched him stroll out of his white frame house as the summer sun was setting. He wore boots, brown tan duck-back hunting pants, a red wool shirt, and wide greenish-yellow suspenders with leather fobs. He had to collect only a few more items before we would be on our way. I watched him as he gathered his cold-handle frying pan and black-stained coffee pot—both veterans of many a foxhunt in the Haywood County hills.

The sun dropped a little deeper behind the Champion paper mill as Uncle Joe walked from the back porch carrying his silver kerosene lantern. Its slick, worn, gleaming finish spoke to its many nights on the mountain. After filling the lantern, Uncle Joe replaced the potato on the kerosene can spout, knowing that the wick was ready to last till first light.

Jim Ab and I jumped into the Jeep at Uncle Joe's command, and we were off into the now cool air of a typical Canton summer night as the crickets and katydids chanted their greetings to the mountain men seeking the serenity of a star-peppered night atop a mountain ridge.

We stopped at Trantham's service station where Uncle Joe directed the filling of the Jeep's gas tank and purchased two Tampa Nugget cigars—just enough for the night-long hunt. Jim Ab, who was born on Uncle Joe's birthday, sat in the middle straddling the gearshift, while I got to sit next to the open air in the doorless vehicle. The dash light and parking lights were burning as we adjusted our feet around the lantern resting on the tarpaulins, which covered the floorboard of the old flathead Jeep.

From Trantham's we crossed Newfound Street and headed down Hilltop Road, which led to Uncle Joe's dog lot and to the audible welcome of the Walker hounds knowing their master had arrived. Uncle Joe lit the lantern and I held it as he entered the lot and ordered Rooster, Powder, and the other named hounds to submit to the leashes which he carried over his shoulder with their leather hand holds, their well-used snaps, and their clanking links. The makeshift wooden gate closed, leaving behind the barking dogs that would not run this night. The moon shone the way for the sturdy green Jeep as we left the lot behind.

We drove on as the cool summer air penetrated my thin brown jacket. Eventually, we left the blacktop pavement of Newfound Mountain in favor of the hills where the Walker hounds ran in pursuit of the red-back fox. We parked the little green Jeep and hefted our knapsacks. Uncle Joe handed us both a leash with two dogs each and we started up the mountain. The kerosene lantern, which Uncle Joe carried in one hand, lit the way with the

aid of the glowing moon as my brother and I were pulled up to the ridge top by the strong, yearning hounds who already knew the scent of the wily fox.

Uncle Joe tied the pack of hounds to two of the many fence posts which dotted the hill as he greeted Carroll, Fred, and Hershel, who were already there sitting by the biggest campfire my eight years had seen. Jim Ab, who was eleven years old, and I thought only of warming by the blazing fire as our aging uncle dropped his haversack on the "Joe Burnette side of the fire," and stood tall as he asked his fellow hunters if the hounds had yet struck a track. Carroll said that they had and suggested that Uncle Joe "turn loose" and add his dogs to the chase.

The race was on! The hound music rang loud! Clear barks and humorous conversation were the norm with only the occasional interrupting voice of Uncle Joe when he said, "Hush! Listen!" We knew to stop talking and to savor the unique deep voice of each hound. "That's Rooster—Hush!—Believe Powder's picked it up! Yep, that's him! He's a coarse-mouthed dog!" proclaimed Uncle Joe. We knew to continue our silence when he spoke, his hunting coat covering his tall, slender frame beneath his graying hair. His leathery face was stoic, knowing, and content. The fox race progressed as each hunter claimed his dog had the lead position. Bragging rights were a fundamental part of the sport.

Around one in the morning Uncle Joe said, "Boys, could you eat a little?" We said that we could as he reclaimed his hallowed spot by the fire and brought forth his black cold-handle frying pan and ancient coffee pot. He told us that it was neither ethical nor proper to cook before midnight as he stepped away from the fire and said, "Jim Rabbit—pour some wash water over my hands and we'll cook a little!" Grease popped, whole wheat bread emerged, and mustard was spread. We ate thick, juicy hamburgers, with taste enhanced by the fragrance of the mountain air mingled with the thick scent of hardwood smoke.

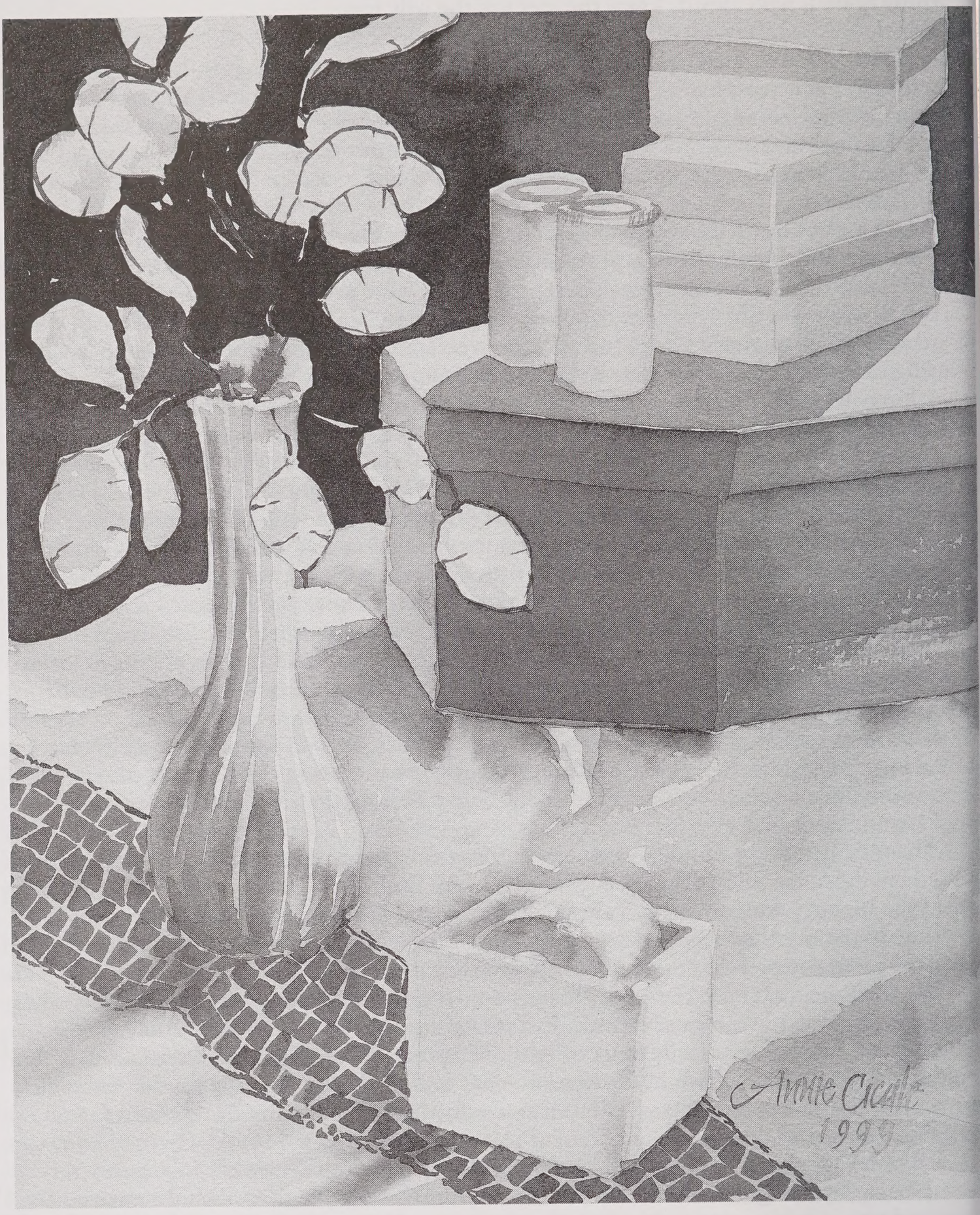
The coals whitened as Uncle Joe burned out the cold-handle frying pan and more locust wood was piled on the fire. He phrased out a catchy tune to which my brother and I fell asleep.

The dawn sprinkled us with the summer dew as Uncle Joe pulled the blanket closer over us and asked if we had slept warmly. We dozed a few minutes more and awoke to the aroma of bacon frying over the stoked up fire. Eggs would soon find their way to the pan and we would eat once more.

The fox race had been run and the grown-ups talked about the tremendous chase we had missed having fallen asleep. Uncle Joe stood up with his hunting horn pressed to his lips and called the hounds, announcing the chase's end. The mid-morning sun signaled to us that it was time to put out the fire and pack up our gear. We had to pull the tired, balking hounds down the mountain and load them into the dog crate in the back of the Jeep.

We were yawning from the late bedtime and the new experience as Uncle Joe dropped us off at our house at 75 Newfound Street. In our familiar beds we slept away the day with intermittent dreams realistically flavored with the scent of hounds and dog bread, fresh coffee and bacon, the drone of the hunting horn, the bay of the Walkers, and the rhythm of Uncle Joe singing his trademark song— "She began to whistle and I began to dig. Believe to my soul t'was a whistlin' pig!"

This was a foxhunt with Uncle Joe, the peerless patriarch of the sport. Like green '48 jeeps, those days are gone—as are Uncle Joe and Jim Ab—but the decades-old memories are crisp and warm and lingering when July days are hot and long and the distant bark of a Walker hound echoes off a mountain ridge. Those days were genuine and uncomplicated, and they made for special recollections. I miss those days very much when a bold, bright, yellow-white summer evening moon starts to awaken behind the treetops of a hazy mountain knob.



Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Praying for Peonies

Nancy Dillingham

When ice backs up
and gives way to water
and rain and spring

I find myself
praying for peonies

lush like hills
suffused with the patina
of multi-hued greens

soft as shell-pink clouds
at sunrise

As morning hangs heavy
and fog wraiths mingle
among trees

dampened with dew
and drenched with light

I dig in the dirt
and pray for peonies
pushing tubers towards earth

tremulant for beauty
and for birth

Notes on Contributors

Sue Wright Barron teaches English in the English and Foreign Languages Department.

Bill Brooks is lead instructor for the Blue Ridge Writers' Program and is the author of ten novels.

Fred Chappell, featured guest poet, teaches at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. A native of Canton, NC, he is the author of numerous novels and books of poetry. His most recent work is *Look Back All the Green Valley*.

Annie Cicale teaches art in the Division of Continuing Education.

Nancy Dillingham is an instructor in Adult Basic Skills. She is the author of *New Ground*, women's literary collection of short stories and poetry, published in 1998.

Julia Nunnally Duncan teaches in the English Department at McDowell Technical Community College.

Bill Findley teaches English in the English and Foreign Languages Department.

Randee Brenner Goodstadt is chairperson of the Sociology and Behavioral Sciences Department.

Thomas Gore works in the Learning Resources Center.

Jan Cavanaugh Graham teaches developmental English and reading at Mayland Community College.

Tommy Hays, featured quest writer, teaches in the Creative Writing Department at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. He is the author of *Sam's Crossing* and *In the Family Way*.

Will Hooper teaches physics in the Division of Arts and Sciences.

Richard B. Hurley is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College and Human Resources Manager for Square D Company.

Becki Janes works in the Division of Continuing Education.

Parker Lewis teaches in the Compensatory Education program.

Dara Llewellyn teaches English in the English and Foreign Languages Department.

Mary McClurkin teaches English in the English and Foreign Languages Department.

Shirley McLaughlin is Director of the Learning Resources Center.

Gerald Metz teaches English as a Second Language in Adult Basic Skills.

Celia Miles teaches English in the English and Foreign Languages Department.

Beth Richardson Mitchell is lead communications instructor at Mayland Community College.

Sandra Brugh Moore teaches art in the Division of Continuing Education.

Robert O. Parriott teaches biology at Mayland Community College.

Mollie Rubin (Rose) is an instructor in the Human Resources Development Program.

Lee Schleining is Coordinator, Audio-Visual Services.

Constance McCall Smutz teaches in the Compensatory Education program.

Lee Sokol is a secretary in the Division of Business and Hospitality Education.

Rita Speltz is an instructor in Adult Basic Skills.

Gabrielle Thompson is a library technician at McDowell Technical Community College.

Sharon Trammel teaches art in the Humanities Department.

Nancy L. Williams teaches English at Tri-County Community College.

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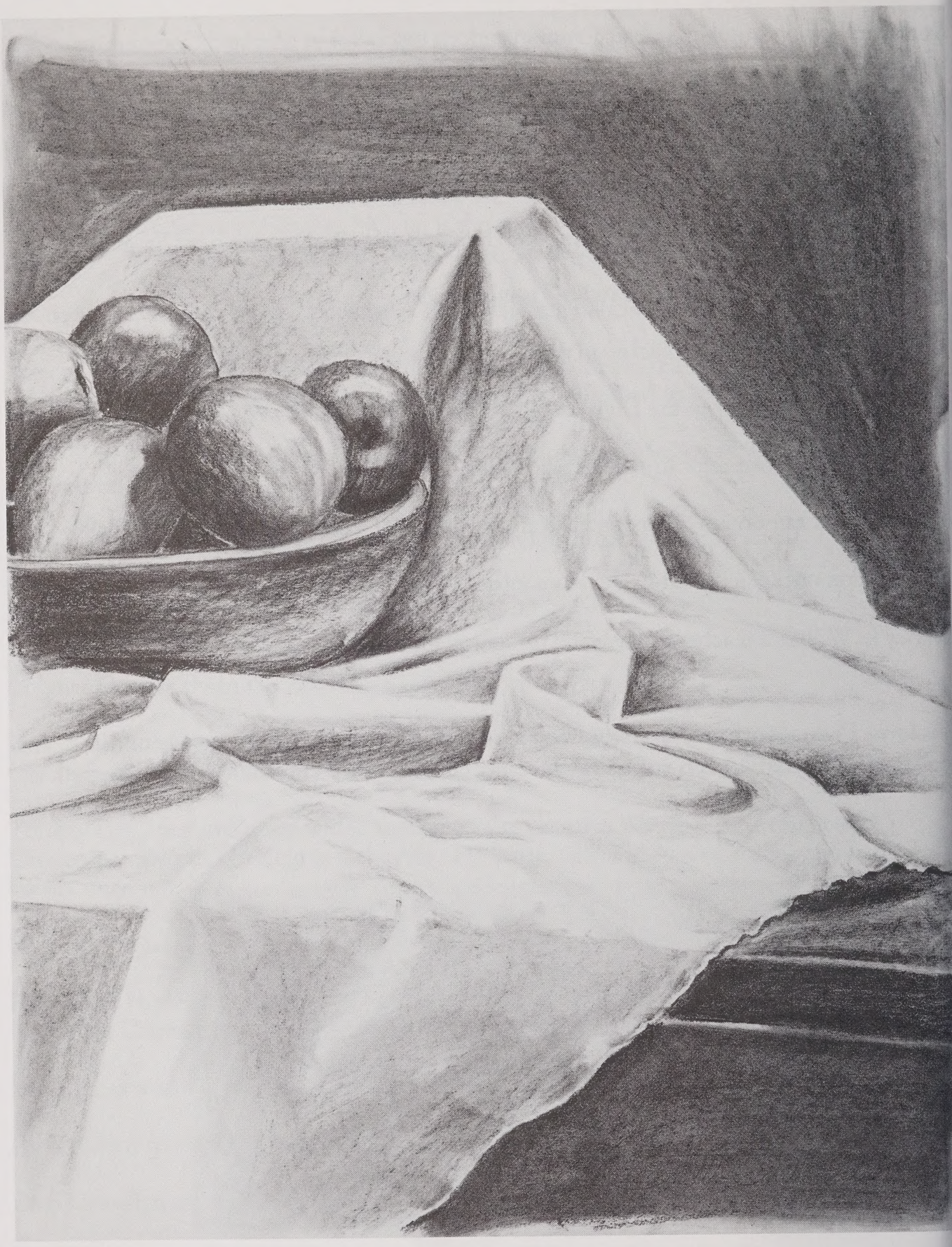
Victoria Press Editorial Board members with North Carolina poet laureate Fred Chappell. (L to R: Mary Hay Gwynn, Nancy Dillingham, Lisa Johnson, Fred Chappell, David Holcombe, Lee Sokol, Tom Rash, Alma Fisher, and Celia Miles) Photo by Susan Chappell.



Drawing by Annie Cicale